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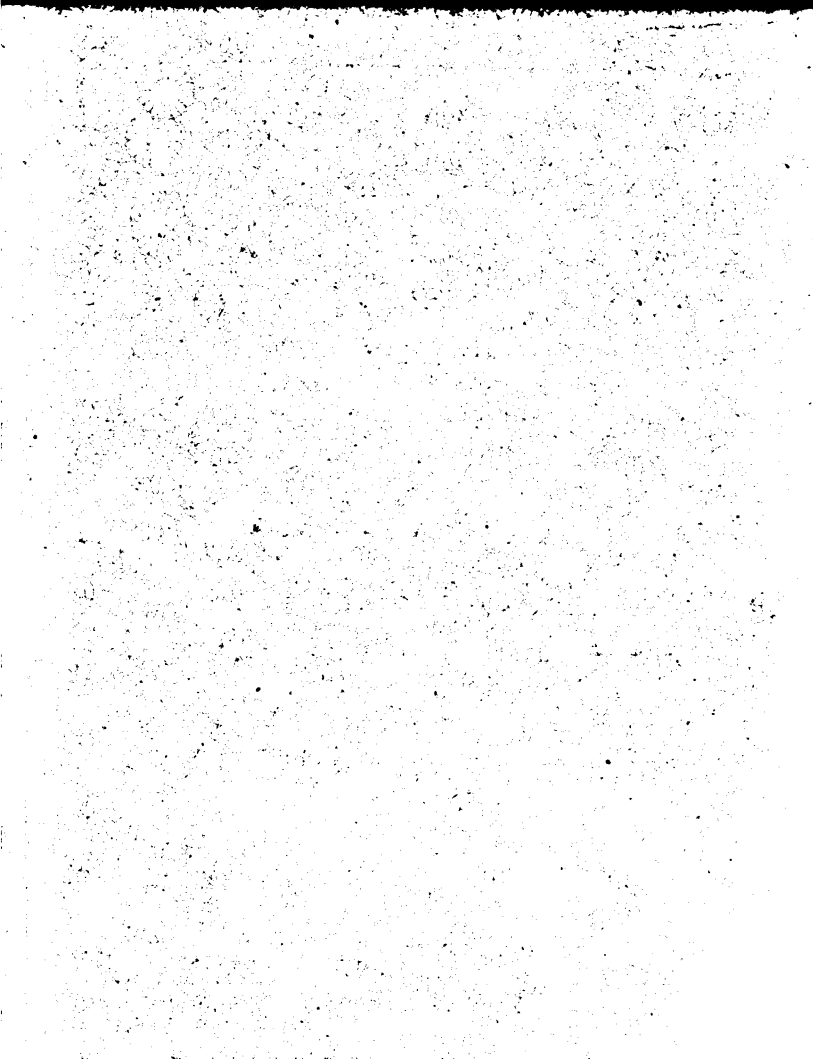


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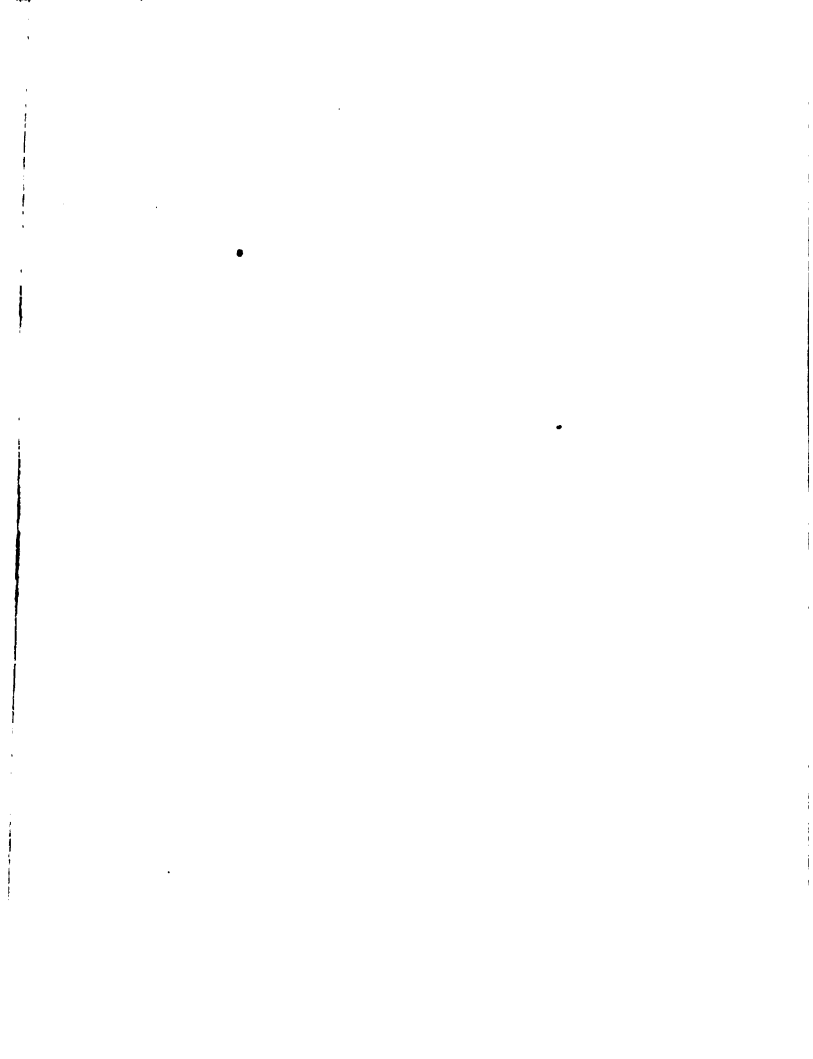
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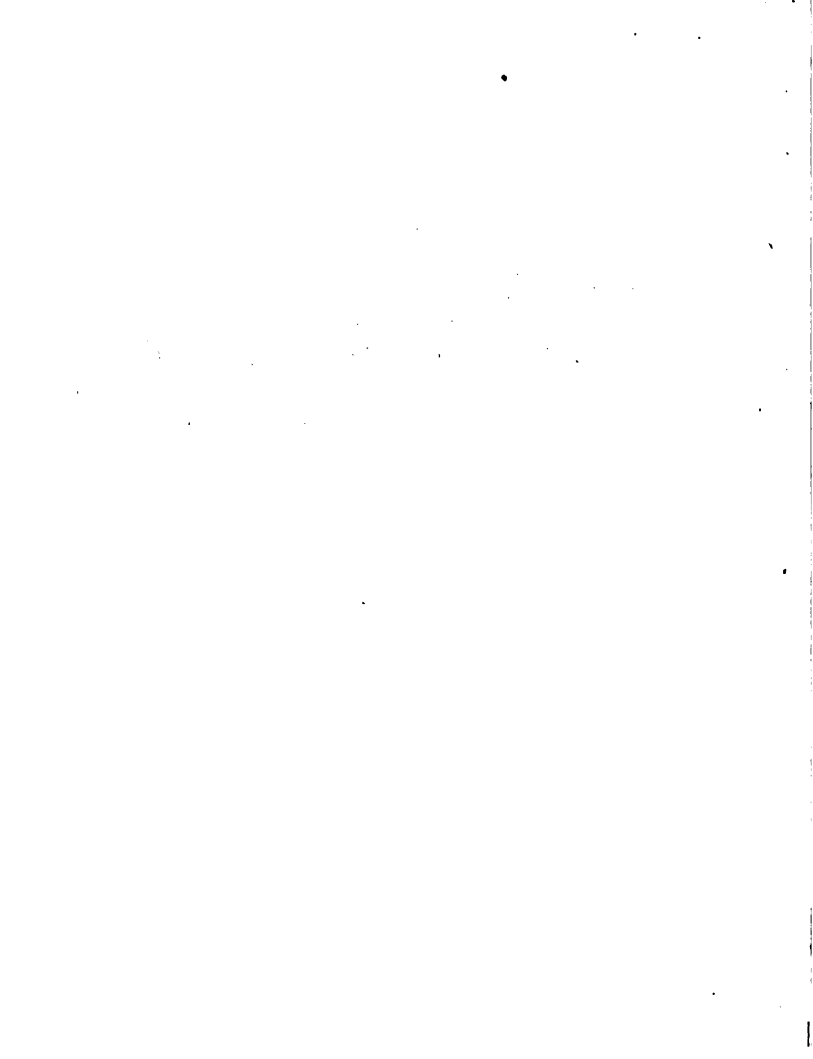
GEORGE H. ELLIS.

1891.









Deacon Herbert's Bible-class

BY

JAMES FREEMAN CLARKE

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*c.*  
BOSTON

GEO. H. ELLIS, 141 FRANKLIN STREET

1890

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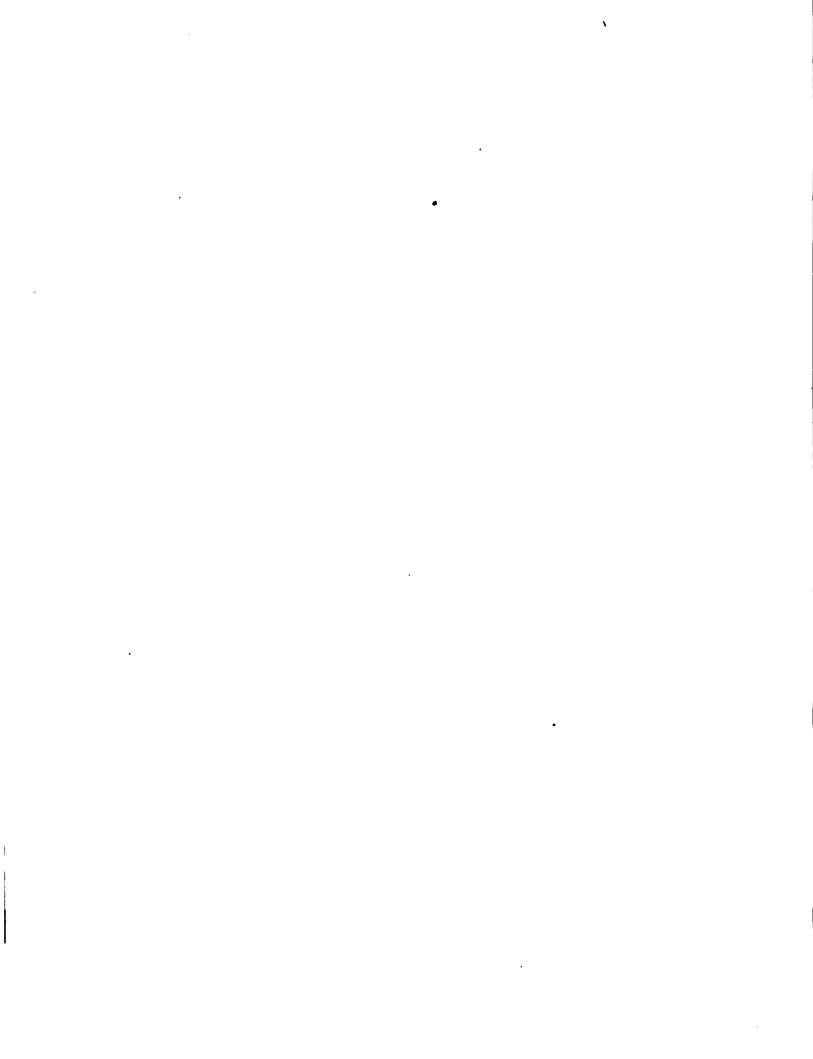


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“Deacon Herbert’s Bible-class” was first written as a series of papers, and printed in the *Christian Inquirer*, many years ago. These papers have been collected and put into their present shape with the hope that they may be of some use to Bible-classes and Sunday-school Teachers.

L. F. C.

MAGNOLIA, July 31, 1890.



# Deacon Herbert's Bible-class.

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## I.

### THE WAY WE HELPED OUR MINISTER TO WRITE GOOD SERMONS.

ONE evening (it was Monday) I stopped at the post-office after the school was out, to get my papers, with a secret hope also, I admit, that I might find a letter in a fair female hand. The mail was not sorted; and, while waiting, I listened to a conversation which was going on in the office.

"That sermon yesterday was too bad," said young Townsend, the lawyer. "I really think I shall leave off going to meeting. It does me no good. I feel so vexed and ashamed that I should be better at home."

"What was the matter with the sermon?" said Farmer Haystack. "I was sick on Sunday, and stayed at home."

"The whole parish will be sick on Sunday,

soon," replied Townsend. "Matter? Nothing was the matter: that was just it. There was no matter in the sermon at all. It was a perfect phenomenon, it was so empty."

"Then it illustrated Bishop Berkeley's theory of the world,—not substantial, only phenomenal," said young George Classic, who was spending his college vacation among us. No one seemed to notice his remark, however.

"I should not mind much the sermon's being empty," said Dr. Hunter: "if that were all, I could go to sleep. But the minister puts such odd things into it, which have nothing to do with his subject. He tells us the stories we have just been reading in the newspapers."

"And tells them as if he had half forgotten them," added another.

"He seems half asleep all the time," continued Dr. Hunter. "Then he must needs be always talking about slavery,—a thing we have nothing to do with. I have no doubt Squire Merrimac, who owns so much factory stock, and whose son is married in Georgia to a planter's daughter, will leave the society before long."

"My friends," said a quiet voice from behind me, "it is our fault that our minister does not

write good sermons. We do not help him write good sermons. We do not help him write them, as we ought."

I looked around, and saw Deacon Herbert. The deacon was a man whom everybody loved and respected. They loved him for his familiar, affectionate interest in the whole community, and for his perpetual usefulness. He was always doing some good thing, and inducing others to join him in his good enterprises. He was respected for his keen sagacity and sterling sense. He was apt to put things in rather a paradoxical way, and no one always knew at first whether he were speaking seriously or ironically. But this drew attention; and he was sure to show before he had done speaking that there was a button of gold deposited by his analysis at the bottom of the crucible. So we all turned round to hear the deacon.

"How can we help him write good sermons, Deacon?" said Townsend.

"Not the way you are doing now. This talk of yours will make them five per cent. worse. The next time you go to church you will all feel bound, for the sake of consistency, to find fault with something; and so the sermon will seem

worse than ever. And it will be worse, too; for he will feel your want of sympathy, and that will freeze his thoughts. No: if we want good sermons, we must help write them ourselves."

"I thought it the minister's duty to write the sermon, not ours," said Townsend.

"So it is your business to argue in court for your clients. But suppose they should not care a copper whether you won their case or not, and should not furnish you with the facts, and should sometimes give you wrong information on the subject. Suppose the jury should yawn and go to sleep during your argument, and the judge read the newspaper. What sort of an argument would you make then?"

"But we pay our minister a good salary, and he has nothing to do but to write sermons, and ought to write interesting ones," said Dr. Hunter.

"The citizens of this town might pay you five thousand dollars a year to attend them when sick," returned Herbert; "but, if they would not tell you their symptoms, nor take your medicine, would the five thousand dollars help you cure them?"

"But still," said Townsend, "I do not see

how we can help the minister write any better. If a man has no talent, we can't give it to him."

"I would take," said the deacon, "the worst candidate who ever came from Andover or Cambridge, and, provided he wished to be useful, I would agree he should become so, with such a society as I can conceive of to help him preach. But our minister is not the worst, even in our neighborhood. He is not wanting in talent, and you all admit that he is a well-informed, kind-hearted, and industrious man. Better still, he is a man of real piety. On the other hand, we are not such a society as I could imagine; but, such as we are, if we do our duty, I will engage that within a year he shall preach good sermons, that will satisfy you all. Will you try the experiment?"

"Decidedly we will," said Dr. Hunter. "And we will give our minister not one, but three years in which to improve himself. He was three years at the theological school: he may study now three years more with his parish."

"Good!" said the deacon. "What are the faults you find with him?"

"First," answered Townsend, "his sermons have nothing in them."

"Secondly," said the doctor, "his delivery has no animation; thirdly, he fills them with stories which have nothing to do with his subject; and, finally, he keeps up a constant talking about slavery and politics, and such matters."

"Very well," returned the deacon: "all these faults grow out of the first, and that is your fault as well as his. He will never have anything interesting to say to you until you let him know your spiritual needs, and make him your confidant, and so furnish him every week with facts and subjects of living interest on which to exercise his mind. If he has nothing interesting to say, his delivery will inevitably be inanimate. If you do not furnish him with illustrations from your own lives, his illustrations will be far-fetched, and he will take his subjects from politics or from anything else that really interests him."

"Still," said the doctor, "I do not see what we are to do. You are not going to tell him, I suppose, that we propose to interfere in his sermon-writing."

"Why not?" said the deacon. "I do not read Goethe, but I have seen one line quoted



from him which I should like to have engraved in gold letters upon every pulpit in the land,—

‘Between *us*, at least, let there be truth.’\*

If there cannot be truth between a minister and his people, where can it exist? If the people have not enough confidence in the humility and devotion of their minister to tell him what they think would improve his public services, the relation between them is a failure. No: I shall go to our minister and tell him of this conversation, and propose to him to meet his people every week on Monday evening, and have free and familiar conversation on a series of subjects of practical Christianity. I shall tell him that we wish him to know what our doubts, obscurities, and troubles are in reference to these matters, before he preaches upon them. I shall tell him that we think this will make his services more directly useful to us all. I have no doubt he will gladly assent to it; for, whatever your opinion may be, I think him a man who really wishes to do us all the good he can.”

“So do I,” said Townsend. “But you need not tell him what we have been saying about his sermons.”

\*“Zwischen uns, sey Wahrheit.”—*Iphigenia*.

“Ah, Brother Townsend,” replied the deacon, shaking his finger at the lawyer, “before you speak again in a public place of a good man’s follies or faults, ask yourself whether you would be willing to repeat to his face what you say behind his back.”

Our minister entered warmly into the plan; and it is extraordinary how well it succeeded. To be sure, we had some difficulty in persuading many persons to express themselves at these social discussions; but the deacon made everything easy by his familiar way. Instead of having the subject opened in a formal manner, we found ourselves talking about it before we knew the discussion had begun. Even the women would sometimes become so much interested that they would begin to speak, and speak remarkably well, when they had only intended to ask a single question. Sometimes the conversation was very tender, and some deep experiences would be artlessly expressed by one and another. Next Sunday we were sure to have something in the sermon applicable to what had been said, and all were more ready to attend to it on account of the previous conversation. Our minister now was never at a loss for subjects;

and he was obliged to put off for eight months, and finally to postpone entirely, a sermon he had half written on the "Moral Influence of Steamships." His subjects were usually "Providence," "Prayer," "Repentance toward God," "Faith in Jesus Christ," "The New Birth," "Family Devotion," "Honesty in Business," "Family Duties," and the like. The sermons were not only more interesting on account of the previous meetings, but the meetings were more interesting because of the sermon which we knew was to follow.

Our minister once told me that, on Tuesday morning, he was always seated at his desk by candle-light; and that by Tuesday noon the greater part of his sermon was written for the next Sunday. "But," added he, "I study harder than ever. So many questions are started in my mind by our Monday evening conversation that I am searching in all my books for light concerning them till the end of the week. Moreover," said he, "my pastoral visiting is much easier, for I always have something to talk about. Formerly, I would sometimes visit my parishioners and spend a quarter of an hour in talking of the weather, crops, etc.

Now I always find them with something in their mind which they wish to say to me, but had no opportunity of saying on Monday evening. They attend to my sermons a great deal better than they did before, and our church is increasing both in numbers and in a good religious spirit."

This was the way we helped our minister to write good sermons. And, for my own part, I heartily wish we had a Deacon Herbert in every church in the land.

## II.

### AIM OF LIFE.

I BELIEVE I have told you nothing as yet about Deacon Herbert's Bible-class. It meets at his house every week, and last evening I was present. His plan, I found, was to take some interesting passage of the New Testament, and make it the subject of conversation. When I entered, the deacon was reading this text, "To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." I supposed the subject would be the purpose of Christ's coming. But I was mistaken.

The deacon opened the conversation as follows: "Our Master tells us in this text why he came into the world. It was 'to bear witness to the truth,' not to *teach* it merely, but to bear witness to it. We read elsewhere that he 'went about doing good,' but that was not the object of his coming. It was a particular kind of good which he came to do, by means of truth. Again, we read that 'he died for our sins'; but that was not the object of his coming. And,

again, we read that he 'became perfect' through the sufferings he endured. But he did not come in order to become perfect. All these were secondary objects,—means to a higher end. The great end of his life, which he kept before his mind always, was 'to bear witness to the truth.' I believe the Greek word means *to be a martyr* to the truth. We now know what was Christ's object in the world. It was to give his testimony, by action and suffering, life and death, by doing good and bearing evil, by his Sermon on the Mount and his words on the cross, by his authority over nature, and his tenderness toward man,—by all this, I say, to give his testimony *to the truth.*"

"Now, I have another question to ask. What is the object of *our* lives? We know what Christ came to do. What did *we* come to do? We know what his mission was. What is ours? or have we any mission? Ought we to have any object for which to live?" Here the deacon stopped.

There was a silence. At last, Farmer Haystack said: "I learned in my catechism, when I was a boy, that the chief end of man was to glorify God, and enjoy him forever. That was

the object then. But our new catechisms say nothing about the chief end of man. And I don't know what is the object now."

"All the worse for us," replied the deacon, "if our catechisms say nothing on this subject. Your answer, Farmer, is perhaps the right one; but it is a little obscure and a little indefinite. What is meant by glorifying God, and how do we glorify him?"

"Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.'" This answer came from the Widow Perkins, a good lady, who was "mighty in the Scriptures." And we all smiled, for it seemed quite apposite.

"Or, in other words," said young Townsend, our good-natured lawyer, "the chief end of man is to do his duties."

"This, too, is good, but still, as I think, indefinite," replied the deacon. "I am asking what is the great duty of life, and you tell me it is to do my duty. But what is my duty? This is what I wish to know. Is there any great idea of duty to which I can devote myself, which shall include all other duties? Is there any chief end to which all others shall be subordinate? Is there any course of conduct to

which all actions shall be ancillary? In short, ought I, like Jesus, to have a great object always before me, which shall be infinite and extending beyond time? Or ought I, like the mass of men, who live without an object, to live, as it were, from hand to mouth? Or ought I, like many others, to have an object in life, but one only *temporal*,—as to become rich, learned, famous, influential?”

“Explain yourself more fully,” said Dr. Hunter, who had been listening diligently. “I do not think we quite understand you.”

“Well, then,” said the deacon, “I will try to explain my meaning further. The great misery of life, I have observed, is to be without an object. The great happiness of life is to have a great and worthy object to which to devote one’s self. Now, the mass of men, high or low, have no such object. They have a routine of work or a routine of pleasure, neither of which leads to anything. They have no sense of progress or accomplishment. So long, however, as they have work enough to do,—as by God’s good providence most of us have,—they can be contented and even cheerful, though not satisfied. For content is not satisfaction; and at



the bottom of the heart there is a want of satisfaction, so long as we are making no real progress. Something more like satisfaction comes to those who have an object which covers the whole or the greater part of the present life. The scholar, whose object is knowledge, the artist, following the ideal of beauty continually, the ambitious man, climbing higher every day,—these have a sense of progress. But the object for which they live is, after all, a worldly one; and, for real satisfaction, we need something as infinite as the capacity of our heart, which is like that of the sea, into which ‘all rivers run, but it is not full.’ Do you understand me now?”

“I think so,” replied the doctor. “When I have been making visits to my patients all day, I feel better contented than if I had been idle. But this mere routine of duty does not satisfy me, unless my motive and aim in all these visits has been a high one. It is not merely doing a right action, but doing it with a right intention, that satisfies us.”

“Very well,” said the deacon: “what, then, is the right motive, from which all our actions should proceed?”

"I think," returned the doctor, "that our object in life should be *to do good*, to make ourselves as useful as possible, to do the greatest good to the greatest number. I think that this must be the Christian object, because Christianity is essentially love. When, therefore, I go out in the morning to visit my patients, instead of trying to get as many fees as I can, I try to give the most of my time and my thought where I can be the most useful."

"Very well," said the deacon: "here is one answer to my question. Has any one any objection to make to it?"

After a few minutes' reflection, I spoke myself, and said: "I should be sorry even to seem to object to such a course of life as our good doctor proposes. And yet, as an answer to the question, his statement does not seem quite adequate. At least, such an aim in life would not, I think, suit or satisfy me. I think I could do more good by making it my aim *to become good*. If I am good myself, I shall be sure to do good to others. I should place the aim of life, therefore, not in benevolence, but in self-culture. For it is evident that of two persons, each trying to do all the good he can, the one whose

powers of mind and heart are most developed, whose habits are most wisely regulated, who has the greatest knowledge of men and things, will be the most useful. If I desire to do good, then, I can best attain that object by proposing to myself a higher one,—personal improvement. My objection to *benevolence* as the aim of life is that it would lead, I fear, to *shallowness*."

"And my objection to self-culture as the aim of life," said the doctor, "is that it would lead to *selfishness*. I think I have known those who proposed to themselves, as their aim, this self-development; and the result has been that they became absorbed in self. If my highest aim is self-culture, then I must sacrifice to it my neighbor's interest, where the two seem to be opposed. For instance, I am following out some important train of thought—I am pursuing some valuable study—and I am called upon to take this time to visit the sick or to relieve the poor. If my highest aim is self-culture, I shall continue my studies, and let the poor take care of themselves. Perhaps I ought to do so in some particular case. But, if this is the *rule of my life*, it will necessarily produce selfishness."

"But," said I, "has not Jesus taught, in the

parable of the ten pounds, that we shall be rewarded or punished according as we *improve* our powers and faculties, or neglect to improve them?"

"Has not Jesus taught," replied the doctor, "in the twenty-fifth chapter of Matthew, that we shall be rewarded or punished at the last day according as we have *fed the hungry, clothed the naked, visited the sick*, etc., that is, according as we have made it our aim to do good?"

"I remember," I answered, "a friend of mine whose rule of life was general usefulness. He never considered his own needs, either outward or inward. He would always give up an opportunity of self-improvement, no matter how important it might be, to be of use in any way to any one who asked his aid. The consequence was that in this way his mind became empty, his character lost its depth. He had given himself all away, and had taken no time to renew his powers, refresh his energies, to gain new strength or new insight. He at last perceived the mistake himself, and said, 'I shall change my course, and take a part of my time henceforth for my own improvement; for I see that I cannot give to others except I have something in myself to give.'"

“Your story,” said the doctor, “is a good one; but I can match it. I also had a friend who made *self-culture* his rule. The greatest part of his time he devoted to solitary study and reflection. He sought to develop his mind and character by all the means in his power; but he did not seem to feel that any one had claims upon him. His mother and sisters were poor, and supported themselves by hard work: he did nothing for their aid, comfort, or enjoyment. At last he married,—when he thought that marriage was necessary for his own culture. Still pursuing the same great idea, he left his wife and children, and took the means which should have been used for their support to enable himself to travel abroad; for he thought it necessary for his culture to see the Pyramids and the Vatican. In short, he became a conceited egotist with his ‘self-culture.’ I confess this instance has made me sick of the very word.”

I was silent, for I thought we had had our share of the conversation; and besides, to tell the truth, I did not know exactly what to reply. So Deacon Herbert spoke: “As far as I can see,” said he, “you have confuted each other;

and I suppose you must both be wrong. The schoolmaster has shown that, if we make doing good the aim of life, it will lead to *shallowness*; and the doctor has shown that, if we make self-culture the aim of life, it will lead to *selfishness*. There must then be some other answer to our question. Can any one give it?"

Hereupon good Mr. Warland, the Sunday-school superintendent, spoke for the first time. He was a very modest man,—modest even to diffidence. He seemed to be afraid of the sound of his own voice; and I have known him to sit a whole evening in his own parlor, with one or two friends whom he had invited to come in, and not utter a sentence the whole time. The wonder, therefore, was how he ever came to be superintendent of the Sunday-school; for in that capacity he frequently had to address the children and teachers. The explanation was to be found in his phrenological development and in his Christian experience. A large organ of cautiousness and a small organ of self-esteem, with a great deal of reverence and conscientiousness, made him diffident. But he had a large development of the love of children; and this, with his reverence and conscientiousness, made him

take pleasure in the Sunday-school. Then he was a genuine Christian, and had a constant desire in his heart to promote the cause of Christ and to do the will of God. In the power of faith and prayer, therefore, he could speak in the Sunday-school when he was silent at his own dinner-table. He could speak courageously if duty commanded, where men braver by nature than he would have shrunk back. So Mr. Warland broke the silence.

“I have often heard it said by ministers in their sermons that we ought to make it our great object *to save our souls*. What do you think of that answer, Deacon Herbert?”

“What do you think of it yourself, Mr. Warland?” said the Deacon. “My business is to ask questions, not answer them. The presiding officer of a meeting, even though he be called the ‘speaker,’ is not to speak himself, but to hear others speak. So, Mr. Warland, what do you think of that answer yourself?”

A quiet smile rested for a moment on Mr. Warland’s lips before he rejoined, “I think that to make it our chief aim to save our own soul is the same thing in another form as self-improvement or self-culture, and, like these, may lead to selfishness.”

“How so?” said Farmer Haystack. “Is it wrong to labor for the salvation of our own souls?”

“Certainly not,” said Deacon Herbert; “and yet it seems to me that a man who is making this his highest aim is not yet a Christian. He may be on his way to Christianity, but he is not a Christian yet. The Christian has no more anxiety about the salvation of his soul than he has about the events of his earthly life. He trusts both to God. He expects to be saved by God, and not to save himself. It is too great a work for him to do. If it is done at all, it must be done by the power of God; and, as regards his own salvation, his duty is mainly faith. I do not find that it was the object of the apostles to save their own souls. It seems to me that their object was to save the world, not themselves.”

“Yes,” said the doctor. “Whenever the Christian Church has taught that the great object of Christians is to save their own souls, it has resulted in a kind of religious selfishness. Thus, in the first centuries of the Church, thousands of Christians turned anchorites, and lived in cells, in order to save their souls by self-denial



and prayer. But they left their duties to their fellow-men unfulfilled. So in the Middle Ages they went into monasteries and nunneries to save their souls and the effective force of Christendom, which should have been employed in civilizing society, was consumed in the seclusion of the convent. So now the members of most of our churches seem to think that church and church meetings are places where they go to secure their own salvation, and not to consult or labor together for the salvation of society. I saw a statement in a newspaper, the other day, that the churches of a certain city collected annually for religious purposes the sum of \$250,000, and that the city did not contain a single hospital to which a sick man without means could be carried."

There was present an intelligent young lady, by name Alice Alton, a member of the Bible-class, who said: "Perhaps, then, the object of life should be *to do the nearest duty*. What is the objection to this rule? To do always what is nearest to us, taking into view our own capacities and needs, as well as the necessities of those around us. This would save us, perhaps, from the two dangers of selfishness and shallowness."

“But not, I am afraid,” returned Deacon Herbert, “from that of *narrowness*. The rule, I know, has much to recommend it, and as a subordinate rule of conduct may be very useful. It is well, certainly, that the commonest cases of every-day life should be sanctified by the great idea of duty. It is a great thing to be able to say of any one what Dr. Johnson said of his friend Levet:—

‘His virtues walked their narrow round,  
Nor made a pause, nor left a void;  
And sure the Eternal Master found  
His single talent well employed.’

Yet I have known very good people, and people of culture and education, whose minds might have done good in a large circle, who became very narrow by adopting as their rule of life this idea of the nearest duty. With this rule, you never go out to look for work: you must always wait till it comes to you. With this rule, fireside cares, a few friends, one's own associates in business, one's own religious sect, absorb all one's thoughts and interests. The interests of society, of humanity, of the universal Church, of the age, are indifferent to us. We do not care for the cause of truth, peace,

freedom, human virtue, human happiness. The sufferings of the slave, the prisoner, the insane, the ignorant, are not in the sphere of our nearest duties, and they touch us not. I have seen people of the highest refinement and purest virtues, ornaments of their own homes, who cared for nothing beyond them, and who might have learned a lesson from the poor negro wash-woman whose heart was interested in the missions of her church to India and Burmah, and who sheltered under her roof, at the risk of ruin to herself, the fugitive slave flying from oppression."

"I think you are right," said Miss Alton: "I have noticed the same thing. It would seem, then, that each of these answers is partial and incomplete, and that we need a rule which shall include them all. I suppose each of the rules thus far given is good as far as it goes. Each gives one side of the subject. We want some rule which shall give us all sides. We need an idea of life which shall make us actively useful to others, which shall lead us constantly to improve ourselves, which shall insure the salvation of the soul, which shall make us faithful to the nearest duty, yet enlarge our heart till it sympa-

thizes with the interests of our whole race. We need an idea which shall not tend to shallowness, to selfishness, or to narrowness. But is there any rule so comprehensive, and at the same time practical and capable of being applied to the details of every-day life?"

"I think there is," said Deacon Herbert. "You have stated well, it appears to me, what we need. We need an object for our life which shall give us continual motive, which shall take us out of ourselves, which shall give concentration and unity to all our efforts, making our life throughout of one piece" —

George Classic (*aside*).— "Like that of Horace's good man,— '*totus, teres, atque rotundus.*'"

Deacon Herbert.— "Thus giving us the glad feeling of constant progress, of steady accomplishment. Where are we to look for such an aim except in the life of Jesus himself, and in that of his apostles? What was their aim?"

"To bear witness to the truth," said the doctor. "But what truth? Is it any and all truth?"

"To the truth which should establish the kingdom of heaven," said Mr. Warland. "I think I see it now. It is evident that Christians

are to make it their aim to cause God's kingdom to come, and his will to be done on earth as it is done in heaven. 'Thy kingdom come' is the central petition of the Christian's daily prayer, and should be the main desire of his heart. To work for this coming of God's kingdom may perhaps satisfy all the conditions we have affixed to the aim of life. We are to advance the kingdom of God by bearing witness to its truth in word, action, and life. The end is a generous one. It is to do the highest good to others; and, in doing them the highest good, we must also do them all lower good,—as Jesus healed men's bodies that he might heal their souls, too. But to do this work requires constant self-culture, also. For we are to bear witness to the truth, and therefore must know it. We are to bear witness in life, and therefore must make our life noble. This aim avoids narrowness; for Christ's work was to save all mankind, and so we must take an interest in the whole human race."

Mr. Warland stopped, astonished at himself for having said so much. The deacon smiled, and said:—

"Not another word to-night. Mr. Warland

has expressed my thought exactly. We will take up the subject here where he leaves it at our next meeting. And now let us close our meeting with this hymn from Mr. Longfellow's 'Book of Hymns':—

“ ‘Almighty Father! thou hast many a blessing  
In store for every erring child of thine:  
For this I pray,—let me, thy grace possessing,  
Seek to be guided by thy will divine.

“ ‘Not for earth's treasures, for her joys the dearest,  
Would I my supplications raise to thee;  
Not for the hopes that to my heart are nearest,  
But only that I give that heart to thee.

“ ‘I pray that thou wouldst guide and guard me ever;  
Cleanse by thy power from every stain of sin.  
I will thy blessing ask on each endeavor,  
And thus thy promised peace my soul shall win.’”

### III.

#### AIM OF LIFE (*continued*).

THE next week after the conversation last recorded, I was careful to be present at the Bible-class, and found the usual members assembled. Our minister also was present this evening. When the time for beginning our exercises had arrived, Deacon Herbert opened the meeting with a prayer:—

“O Thou who art Light, and in whom is no darkness at all,—in our minds the light shines in darkness. Therefore, we have met together, not now for social amusement, or to pass an idle hour; not to whet our faculties and sharpen our wits by controversy; not to dispute; but to inquire, humbly, of each other and of thee. We know and are sure that we shall obtain what we ask, and find what we seek, if we can be sincere, true, single-minded, and truth-lovers while together. Make us so, O our Father; and then give us such insights and convictions as shall fit us for daily duty and daily trial, fit us to resist temptation and submit to thy will,—which we would ask of thee, the Father, through Christ thy Son, and in the Holy Spirit. Amen.”

“We concluded,” said Deacon Herbert, “at our last meeting, that the aim of the Christian’s life should be to labor with Christ in causing God’s kingdom to come. This evening, we will try to find out what this kingdom of God is, what we can do to make it come, and why this aim is better than any other.”

“I wish to inquire,” said the doctor, “what is the precise meaning of this phrase — ‘*kingdom of God,*’ or ‘*kingdom of heaven*’ — which we so often meet in the New Testament. For example, at the very beginning of the Sermon on the Mount: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven.*’ Does it mean that they shall enter heaven after this life, or that they shall enter the earthly kingdom of the Messiah? It seems to me that our notions are rather vague on this subject.”

“It is evident,” said Townsend, “that the phrase ‘kingdom of heaven’ was understood among the Jews to mean the earthly reign of the Messiah, and that Jesus used the term in the same sense. John the Baptist preached, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’ (Matthew iii. 2.) He must have understood by it the coming of the Messiah to reign. But, as



soon as Jesus began to preach, he used the same language (Matthew iv. 17), saying, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' In the thirteenth chapter of Matthew are seven parables uttered by Jesus concerning the kingdom of heaven, all of which may, and some of which must, refer to the earthly reign of Christ. In the parable of the sower, he describes his coming, and how he would be received by some and rejected by others. In that of the wheat and tares, he teaches that, of those who receive him and enter his outward kingdom as subjects, some are worthy, and some unworthy, which cannot apply to heaven hereafter. The parable of the grain of mustard seed teaches the outward extension of the kingdom of heaven, as an institution. The fourth parable, of the leaven, teaches the inward extension of the kingdom of heaven, as an influence. The fifth parable, of the hidden treasure, describes the inward unseen blessings which a subject of this kingdom has in his soul. The sixth parable, concerning the pearl of price, describes the outward and apparent blessings of the kingdom. And the seventh parable, of the net, shows that this kingdom is an earthly one: its subjects are both good and

bad men, who remain in it together here, but will hereafter be separated. And all taken together plainly show that Jesus means by the kingdom of heaven his earthly reign as Messiah, which no doubt was to bring spiritual as well as temporal blessings to his subjects."

The doctor spoke next. "Friend Townsend," said he, "seems to think that by this phrase 'kingdom of heaven' both the Jews and Jesus himself understood the temporal reign of the Messiah over the Jewish people, in which they were to be made inwardly righteous and outwardly independent and prosperous. The Jews may have had this view; but Jesus himself must have risen far above it, and must have regarded his office and kingdom as an inward and moral one, for he tells Pilate that his kingdom is not of this world, but that he is king of the truth. He says his kingdom comes without being observed, and that men cannot point it out; for it is within them, or in the midst of them. He tells Nicodemus that a man must be born of the Spirit and of water, in order to enter his kingdom; and Paul says that the kingdom of God is not meat nor drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

The minister then spoke, and said: "The kingdom of heaven may be both what Brother Townsend and the doctor have said. It may be an outward visible kingdom and an inward moral kingdom. But the outward kingdom which Christ established was not the Jewish theocracy, but the Christian Church. I understand by the kingdom of heaven the universal Church,—the great company of believers who unite together in the worship and service of God and Christ. To this Church all the parables referred to by Brother Townsend apply well. It is both leaven and mustard seed. It is a great outward institution, and it is a great influence to civilize the world and refine society. Christ reigns in it as king of truth, and by no other force than a moral force. The object of the kingdom is to produce righteousness, peace, and holy joy. Why does not the Christian Church, then, as a great institution, with a visible form, but an invisible moral influence, fully meet all the passages which speak of the kingdom of heaven?"

"I have thought," said the Widow Perkins, "that heaven was hereafter, and not here; for we read that 'many shall come from the east

and west, and shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven'; also, that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.' And Christ says that his disciples 'shall eat and drink at his table in his kingdom.' And at the last supper he speaks of the time when he shall drink the fruit of the vine with them new in the kingdom of his Father, and when he shall say to the good, 'Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'"

"It seems to me," said Mr. Warland, "that Christ's kingdom begins here and continues hereafter. He reigns in this world and also in the other. The idea of the kingdom of heaven enlarges as we look at it. And so it has enlarged in the conception of mankind. It was first the notion of a Jewish Messiah, reigning over the Jewish people. Then it was the notion of the Son of man as a great moral teacher, reigning over the minds and hearts of those who became his disciples, both Jew and Gentile. Then it was the idea of the Son of God, divinely sent to found a great Church, which should unite men in love with God and with each other through all time, and having Jesus always as its

living head. And, again, we see that this Church extends beyond this world into the next; beyond time, into eternity; that the saints below make one communion with the saints above; and that *death*, in the Christian view, ceases to be anything but a mere line separating the two worlds."

"But," said Deacon Herbert, "have we even yet taken in the whole idea? The kingdom of heaven is, first, the reign of the Jewish Messiah; next, the reign of Jesus as a moral teacher over the minds and hearts of men; next, his reign in the Church as Son of God; next, his reign over the redeemed Church above. But, besides this, there is the reign of Jesus in the world,—his influence to purify society and to redeem the race from its outward ignorance and vice. All these ideas are included in the term 'kingdom of heaven'; and when we say, Thy kingdom come, we pray for the extension of Christ's power outwardly and inwardly, here and hereafter, in the Church and in the world, and the aim of a Christian should be to cause, according to his ability, that Christ shall thus reign over human consciences, human minds, human hearts, and human lives."

“This is a very large idea,” said the doctor.

“And, therefore, one which is very apt to be misunderstood,” replied the deacon. “It is not only large, but it is central. It is in the centre of our daily prayer, and should be in the centre of our daily life. It was in the beginning the radical idea of Christianity, out of which every thing proceeded. The apostles announced to Jew and Gentile that Jesus was the Christ; that is, the Messiah who came to establish the kingdom of heaven. Those who believed that he was the Christ were immediately to enter his kingdom and to become his subjects. This was expressed by baptism. As the subjects of his kingdom, they were to labor with him to extend it over the minds and hearts of men, to cause the Christ to reign over others, and over their own souls. While doing this, they were safe. They knew their salvation was secure while they continued the subjects of Christ’s kingdom.”

“That may have been the original idea,” said the doctor; “but ought it to be the idea at the present time? Christianity at first had a great war to wage against unbelief and opposition. It was a kingdom of light seeking to establish itself in a world of darkness. It was surrounded

by opposing religions. Therefore, it was the first business of every Christian to cause his Master to be known, believed in, and obeyed. But the case is different now, at least with us. Almost every one in our community believes in Christ already; and, unless we turn missionaries and go to India, we cannot do the same thing which was the first duty of the early Christians."

"You have now expressed," said the deacon, "what I think a very common error. You say that our community already believes in Christ. In what way do they believe in him? I think usually as an historic Christ, who lived, taught, and died a long time ago for the salvation of the world, and then ascended into heaven; where he remains, ready to receive his friends when they die. But the idea of Jesus as our living King, present in the world to-day, carrying on a great warfare now in society against darkness and sin, at work in the world all around us, the leader of all moral movements, the centre of all moral influences, the fountain of life, perpetually welling out pure waters of safety and comfort,—this idea, I think, is entertained by very few."

"But is it a *true* idea?" said the doctor.  
"Have we any reason to believe that Jesus is

thus personally and actively present in the world?"

"He says, 'Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.' He says, 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' He said to his disciples, 'I go away and come to you.' The early Church, especially the Apostolic Church, fully believed that their Master was with them. If we do not believe it now, we have a different religion from theirs, in a most essential point. The promise which Jesus continually repeated was that he would come and dwell with those who kept his sayings. For my own part, I do not believe in any Christianity apart from Christ."

"What you say," remarked the minister, "affords the best explanation of those obscure passages in which Jesus says that his disciples must eat his flesh and drink his blood; also, of those other passages where, in promising the Comforter,—the Holy Spirit,—he seems to speak of his own inward coming. This also explains two phenomena in ecclesiastical history: first, the power of the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation; and, second, the belief in



the second coming of Christ, which is constantly springing up anew in the Church. The sacrifice of the mass seems to keep Christ personally present with believers. And the doctrine of the second coming is the expectation of such a personal presence hereafter to take place. The error in both cases has been the substitution of a visible and outward presence for an invisible and inward one,—a local and temporary presence for a universal and constant presence. Thus far, men have only been able to believe in a personal and real presence of Christ, by believing in a sensible and outward presence of Christ. When we have sufficient faith in the reality of spiritual things to believe Christ really and personally present when he is spiritually present, then such phenomena as transubstantiation and Millerism will disappear.”

“This doctrine of the real presence of Christ,” said Mr. Warland, “would certainly, if believed, give great meaning to the idea of his kingdom. He is present to my heart, if I believe in him, to supply me with strength to work for him as a member of his Church. He is present with his Church, if it believes in him, to give it strength to work for him in the world. He comes in the

world, as his religion of truth and love becomes more and more powerful to overcome the evils which prevail in society. If we can believe this, then we have a beautiful and noble aim given us in life. It is to cause God's kingdom to come more and more in our hearts, by feeling more and more and receiving more and more the purifying inward presence of our Saviour. It is to cause God's kingdom to come more abundantly in the Church, by causing the Church to receive its life and truth more immediately from its Master, and less from human sources. It is to cause God's kingdom to come in the world by the reformation of social evils, making ourselves Christ's hands and feet, his voice, his instrument in carrying light and love into every haunt of darkness and despair. If we really can believe that Jesus himself is present with us, we shall have courage to attempt this, not otherwise. All depends on faith."

"I am satisfied," said the doctor, "that, with such an object as this, and with such a faith wherewith to accomplish it, we can become far more useful than by merely proposing as our object to do good."

"I am satisfied," said I, "that, with such an object, we should develop all our powers more

fully than if we proposed self-culture as our aim."

"I am satisfied," said Mr. Warland, "that we should be more sure to save our soul than if we proposed the saving our soul as our object."

"I am satisfied," said Alice Alton, "that, with such an object as this, we should be very sure always to do our nearest duty."

"Then," said Deacon Herbert, "we seem to be all of one mind, and we can therefore stop here. So we will sing this hymn before we part:—

"Through Thee we now together came,  
In singleness of heart;  
We met, O Jesus, in thy name,  
And in thy name we part.

"We part in body, not in mind;  
Our minds continue one;  
While each to each in Jesus joined,  
We hand in hand go on.

"Present we still in spirit are,  
And intimately nigh,  
While on the wings of faith and prayer  
We each to other fly.

"Our life is hid with Christ in God;  
Our life shall soon appear,  
And shed his glory all abroad  
In all his members here."

## IV

### TEMPTATION OF JESUS.

I WENT to the Bible-class one evening, when the subject of conversation was the "Temptation of Jesus." I was interested in the discussion, and will endeavor to relate its substance.

Deacon Herbert introduced the subject by reading the passages from the first three Gospels which contain the account of the temptation; namely, the first eleven verses in the fourth chapter of Matthew, the first thirteen verses in the fourth chapter of Luke, and the two verses referring briefly to this event in the first chapter of Mark. After having called our attention to the slight differences in these statements, he said,—

"Now, I should like to have you tell me what you think all this means."

After a short silence, our good farmer said: "The meaning seems plain enough. I suppose that Jesus was really tempted by the devil. I know that it is not the fashion now to believe in a real devil; but it seems to me that the Scripture teaches very plainly that there is one."

"But the question here," said Deacon Herbert, "is not so much whether there be a personal devil as whether he appeared to Jesus in an outward shape as the devil."

"Why not?" said Farmer Haystack.

"Because, by assuming an outward devil, you destroy the reality of the temptation. Would it be any temptation, even to you or me, to have such offers made to us by an actual devil, known to be such, standing before us in bodily form? There would be no great merit in resisting such a temptation as that, I think. It is when he disguises himself as an angel of light, it is when the temptation comes from what seems a good source, and in a plausible form, that it has power. So you see you must choose between a visible devil and a real temptation. You cannot have both."

"I did not think of that," said the farmer.

"Besides," interposed Townsend, "there are other difficulties, if we take the story literally. How could all the kingdoms of the world be seen from the top of a mountain? What temptation would it be to throw one's self from the top of the temple? Is it not evident, that, if the story has any meaning, it cannot be found in its literal form?"

"Some people," said Dr. Hunter, "suppose it to be a vision, or a dream."

"The objection to that," replied the deacon, "is that, if Jesus merely dreamed or imagined these incidents, they would have no importance, and would not have been related. What he saw or did in a dream would have been no real temptation, and would have made no part of his actual experience."

"Some persons," said the doctor, "think the whole story a myth."

"When we can do nothing else with it, we will get rid of it in that way," replied the deacon. "It seems to me that this explanation should be our last resort."

"I have somewhere read," said Mr. Warland, "an explanation which makes the tempter to have been a man sent by the Jewish Council to find out who Jesus was. But this, too, always seemed to me a desperate resort, supported by nothing at all in the narrative. But may not the temptation have been something which occurred in the mind of Jesus, which he described to his disciples in this form?"

"Explain yourself more fully," said the deacon.

“Why, I have supposed that, at the beginning of his ministry, Jesus may have retired into the wilderness to meditate on the work before him, and to prepare himself for it. While there, he may have had a great many thoughts as to the way in which he might employ his miraculous powers, so as to procure for himself recognition, or power, or personal enjoyment. All these temptations he rejected, and afterward described this experience in his life to his disciples, as we now have it.”

“But why should he have put it in this form?” said the doctor: “why not tell the story plainly?”

“Perhaps,” replied Mr. Warland, “his disciples could not have understood the account. The thoughts of Jesus might have been too deep and refined for their comprehension; and so he was obliged to tell it in some such allegorical way as this or not at all.”

“Your explanation,” said the deacon, “must, I think, be the true one, so far as this: that this transaction was something which passed in the mind of Jesus, and was afterward related by him in the form of an allegory or parable; for only by some such supposition can we regard the tempta-

tion as real. But this does not remove all the difficulty. In fact, the chief difficulty remains thus far untouched. Do you suppose that, when these thoughts passed through the mind of Jesus, he *really wished* to use his power for these personal and selfish ends? or did he merely *think about it*, without wishing it?"

"I suppose," said Mr. Warland, "that he merely saw in his own mind how he might use his power, to make himself master of the world, to acquire immense reputation and honor, or to obtain all the joys of life. He saw how he might do this. I do not suppose he wished to do it."

"Why not?"

"Because such a wish would have implied sin; and we are told that, though tempted in all respects as we, he was without sin. Such a wish would have implied selfishness on his part, the desire of preferring his own will to that of God. It would have implied a degree, however slight, of moral depravity."

"But did not the thought imply this, too? Was not the thought a sin, even without any desire?"

"No," interrupted the minister. "Mr. War-



land is right. The thought was no sin, though the wish would have been so. As Milton says,—

“Evil into the mind of God or man  
May come, and go, so unapproved, and not  
Leave any stain behind.”

Jesus might have seen every possible course of action which was open to him; but merely to see these implied no evil, so long as he had no wish to enter upon them. God sees all the evil that there is in the world; but this implies no depravity in him. The mere knowledge of evil is not evil, any more than the knowledge of good is goodness.”

All seemed to be pleased with this view; and the doctor rubbed his hands cheerfully, saying: “I think we have got at the true explanation now. Mr. Warland always helps us out of our difficulties. The thing is perfectly plain.”

“Wait a moment,” said the deacon: “let us not be too sure. Mr. Warland has shown that Jesus may have had these thoughts without sin. But, in that case, what becomes of the temptation? The text says that he was tempted in all points as we, yet without sin. Our task is a twofold one. We have to show on the one side

that the temptation of Jesus was without sin, and, on the other, that he was really tempted as we are. Now, can there be any reality in a temptation where there is not the least desire to do wrong? But, where there *is* desire to do wrong, is there not already sin? Here is the great difficulty which we have to meet. You, Mr. Warland, are the cashier of a bank. You every day handle large sums of money, some of which you might, if you chose, abstract, and no one be the wiser. If such a thought should occur to you to-morrow, would it be any temptation to you?"

Mr. Warland smiled, and said, "I think not."

"I know that it would not," returned the deacon; "and why not? Because you are an honest man. Let a weaker man be placed in your situation, and the thought of taking the money would be the wish to take it, and so would become a real temptation. He might have conscience enough left to enable him to resist; but he would be really tempted. So, if a perfectly temperate man is urged by his friends to drink intoxicating liquor, this suggestion is by no means a temptation; for he has no wish to drink it. It is only when the outward allurements

finds an inward appetite corresponding to it that the suggestion becomes a temptation. The thought of evil without the desire for evil is no temptation ; and, therefore, if Jesus merely had the thought in his mind of any improper way of exercising his power, he was not tempted at all."

"You seem to have led us into a serious difficulty," said Townsend: "now you must help us out of it."

"Not at all," said the deacon. "It is my place to suggest questions and yours to answer them. But let us see where we are. You all admit that the only sound view is one which shall preserve the sinlessness of Jesus on the one hand and the reality of his temptation on the other."

"We do," replied the doctor.

"We have also concluded that one is not really tempted, except he actually desires that which is forbidden."

"On that point there can be no doubt."

"Then there must be some mistake in our other assertion, that the desire to do wrong always argues a depraved appetite, and is in itself sinful. See if you can find any fallacy in that statement."

After a few moments' reflection, Mr. Warland spoke: "You said that if I, in the performance of my duty at the bank, should wish to appropriate to my own use the money passing through my hands, it would argue a dishonest habit of mind. Under most circumstances, I think it would. If I could not see money without wishing for it, it would be the proof of a covetous disposition. But suppose that my family were starving, and I had no means to relieve their hunger, and, in passing the heaps of money displayed in a money-broker's window, I should wish for a single piece of it to save their lives, would that wish imply depravity, supposing that, when I had the opportunity of taking the money without any one's knowing it, I should refuse to do so?"

"You also said," remarked the doctor, "that, when the sight of intoxicating liquor excited a longing for it, it showed the presence of a depraved appetite. So it does; but suppose a person who has signed a temperance pledge is dying of cold or thirst. To violate his pledge, and drink a glass of wine, might be wrong; but to feel a desire for it could hardly be a sin."

"Or suppose," said I, "that I had some duty

to perform at home this evening, which would have prevented me from coming to this meeting. To have neglected the duty in order to come to the meeting would have been wrong; but to wish to come to have the benefit of your conversation could hardly have been wrong. Yet, if I wished to come, I should have wished to do that which was wrong."

"Or suppose," said Townsend, "that some one knocks at my door on a cold day. I find a man there, who tells a pitiful story of his sufferings, and asks for relief. I have decided that it is wrong to give money at the door in charity, because the chances are that I shall be doing harm rather than good. It would be wrong, then, to give the money; but to feel a desire to give the money would not, I judge, imply any special depravity on my part."

"Very well," said the deacon: "you seem to think that to wish to do wrong is sometimes sinful and sometimes not sinful. Now, can you point out when it is sinful and when not, so that we may have some rule by which to judge of each instance?"

"I have been considering the instances already given," said the minister, "and I think

they bring us to this result: that, when a thing is wrong in itself, the desire to do it implies sin; but when it is only wrong *under the circumstances*, then to wish to do it is not necessarily sinful. Thus, to give a poor man a piece of money is not wrong in itself, but only wrong under the circumstances; that is, without proper inquiry. To come to this meeting is not wrong in itself, but only wrong under the circumstances; that is, when it interferes with more important duties. But cruelty, falsehood, excessive indulgence of the appetites, are things wrong in themselves: therefore, a desire to indulge thus implies a depraved appetite."

"This rule," said the deacon, "may answer our purpose sufficiently well. Let us apply it to the case of Jesus, and see what he was tempted to do. Was it something wrong in itself, and therefore implying sin, or only something wrong under the circumstances, and therefore not implying sin? Look at the first of the temptations, and give us an explanation of it."

"If we take it literally," said the minister, "and consider the temptation addressed to the natural appetite of hunger, it is evident that it was only wrong *under the circumstances* to wish

to make the stones into bread. There is nothing wrong in using our power to supply our natural wants; but it would have been wrong for Jesus thus to have used the power given him for another purpose. But I suppose that there is a vast deal more implied in each of these temptations. I think that each stands as the symbol of a whole class of desires which Jesus experienced, but which he was obliged to deny, none of them being wrong in themselves, but only wrong under the circumstances; that is, inconsistent with the particular work which he had to do. I suppose that under this example of hunger is included the hunger of the soul as well as the body. The large soul of Jesus was filled with a boundless desire for a full experience of this life. He loved nature, its sublimity and beauty; but he must deny that taste. His heart hungered for affection; but he had no one to sympathize with him or comprehend him. There was nothing in the world of culture, refinement, or beauty, whether in art, nature, or society, but Jesus felt within himself a capacity for enjoying it. This capacity must be denied, and he must remain only in contact with the earthly, unideal Jewish multitude. He strength-

ened himself for all this renunciation, the extent of which no mortal can comprehend; for no mortal can fathom the capacity of the mind of Jesus. He strengthened himself for it by the thought that true Life comes not from bread or external nutriment, but from the truth which God inwardly communicates to the mind and heart. So I understand this temptation. I suppose that Jesus gave the account to his disciples, because he wished them to feel that they had not a Master who could not be touched with the feeling of their infirmities, but one who was tempted like themselves. But, as they could not in the least have understood his temptations, it was necessary to communicate them under a symbolic garb. The temptations of a good man are incomprehensible to one on a lower plane of development. When we hear a very spiritual person give his experience, what he calls temptation and sin often seem to us almost like virtues. Evidently, therefore, Jesus was obliged to adopt some such symbolical method as this, if he wished to relate the experience to his disciples."

"I very much like what the minister has said," observed Townsend; "but how is it with



the second temptation? It is clear enough that this must be symbolical altogether; for what sort of a temptation would it be to cast one's self from the pinnacle of the temple, in order to be caught by angels when falling? Literally taken, this would be an absurdity. It seems to symbolize the temptation to *display*,—the desire not only to be, but to appear, great and glorious. But, if so, how does this feeling in the mind of Jesus agree with our definition of innocent temptation? I should think that it implied something wrong, if one were not satisfied with *being* great, good, and wise, but also wished to *appear* so. This shows the activity of what the phrenologists call the organ of approbateness, which seems to injure a character."

"Why so?" said Alice Alton. "This organ, if it be one, is put in the head for some good purpose, I suppose; and the love of approbation may have a legitimate sphere of action as well as an excessive one."

"I did not think," said Townsend, "that *you* would defend the love of display; for you have none of it."

"Perhaps, then," said she, "I feel myself deficient for the want of it. But what is there

wrong in wishing to be seen as we are; to be recognized in our real character; not only to be true, but to manifest our truth, and to have it recognized? A truly noble person, sure of his own worth, desires to be understood, not for the paltry gratification of private vanity, but for the sake of truth itself. He did not make his own soul. He did not make his own goodness. God made it: it belongs to God, and should be manifested for the glory of God. Is this not what Jesus means, in the last chapters of John, when he speaks so much of his glory and of being glorified, and of thus glorifying his Father? It was only by being recognized at his true worth that he could glorify God and benefit man."

"Well said," cried the deacon: "I think we begin to understand it. The second temptation, then, means that Jesus was misunderstood by those around him, by his disciples, by the Jewish people, by the Jewish authorities. No one really *saw* him as he was, and he wished to be *seen*; and this was an innocent wish, a right wish in itself. But why was it a temptation, then? Why wrong under the circumstances?"

"The temptation," said Mr. Warland, "I suppose, was to hurry matters; not to wait

God's time; to so manifest his greatness and glory that every one should be convinced. This would have been wrong, because not God's way. In God's way and in God's time, he would be recognized: that was enough. He must not tempt God even to gratify this lawful desire; and he did not. The people came, asking for a sign, ready to believe in him if he would make some special manifestation of his power. But he refused: he overcame that temptation."

"And what is the meaning of the third?" said the deacon.

"That speaks for itself," said Townsend. "It is power, success, triumph. But I suppose no common triumph, for that would have been no temptation. It was no common ambition which tempted Jesus. To conquer and possess all the kingdoms of the world after the manner of an Alexander or Cæsar would have been no temptation to Jesus. But to succeed in establishing his dominion of truth and love in the souls of men, to make the kingdoms of the world the kingdoms of his Father, to establish his religion at once as the universal religion of the Roman Empire, and spare the world the centuries of infidelity, heathenism, heresy, and

error which were to come,—this might have been an innocent temptation to the mind of Jesus. He saw that he could do it, and how: by worshipping the devil for a single moment; that is, by conceding a little to the spirit of the world; by using for a little space worldly means, a little force, a little illusion; by suffering, for one moment, expediency to triumph over principle. That was all that was necessary,—not falsehood, but a little management; not bloodshed, but a little terror. But no. This temptation, to which the noblest minds have so often yielded,—the temptation to use low means for a high end,—did not for a moment perplex the clear mind of Jesus. Better wait a thousand years than establish pure and undefiled Christianity on the throne of the world by a single concession to the principle of evil. ‘Get thee behind me, Satan. Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.’”

“I think,” said Deacon Herbert, “you have surmounted the difficulty, and shown that Jesus could be really tempted, yet without sin. But was he tempted *in all respects as we are?* We have depraved appetites, to which our tempta-

tions are addressed. But his temptations were addressed to undepraved appetites. Our natures are unbalanced, disordered; our organization has been injured by ancestral sins; we inherit depraved tendencies, and we are educated to evil by pernicious example and unhappy circumstances. But Jesus, by the peculiarity of his birth, was free from hereditary evil, and by God's guiding spirit saved from any irresistible action of outward circumstances to his injury. His temptations, therefore, were they not different from ours, after all?"

"They were certainly different in the way you state," said I; "but this difference does not, I think, prevent him from being an example to us in his temptations. For the same elements of human nature were tempted in his case as in ours. All temptation, perhaps, may be included under these three desires,—desire of joy, of fame, of power. The temptation of a pure appetite, when resisted, may serve as an example to teach us to resist the temptation of the same appetite in its depraved condition. So I might use, in a lecture on temperance, the example of Sir Philip Sidney, wounded on the field of battle, who took the cup of water from

his own mouth, and gave it to the parched lips of the dying soldier by his side. His denial of a pure appetite might be an example to the drunkard to resist an impure one."

"Enough," said the deacon: "let us now adjourn."

## V.

### THE PRECURSOR; OR, JOHN THE BAPTIST.

Matt. xi. 1-19. Mark vi. 14-30. Luke i. 5-80; iii. 1-23.  
John i. 15-36.

“TO-DAY,” said the deacon, “we will talk about John the Baptist. Who were his father and mother?”

“Zacharias and Elizabeth,” said Mr. Warland. “We read about them in the first chapter of Luke. Zacharias was a priest, and both were good people. In this chapter, we are told that an angel appeared to Zacharias, and foretold the birth of a son, who should be a prophet, and who should precede God’s new manifestation of himself, who should be a precursor of the Messiah, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. In the third chapter of Luke, also, we have an account of the first preaching of John, in the fifteenth year of the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (which, by the way, gives us the only plain and certain date which we have in the gospel history). He is said to have preached repentance, and a reformation of morals and manners; to have baptized for the

remission of sins ; to have insisted on practical goodness, on strict honesty, on humanity, gentleness, and kindness."

"We also," said Dr. Hunter, "find something about John the Baptist in the first chapter of the Gospel of John. In the sixth verse he is declared to have been, not the Light, but the witness to the Light ; and in the fifteenth verse, and the following verses, he declares himself inferior to Jesus, and sent only to prepare his way. Then we have the account of his baptizing Jesus, in Matthew, Mark, and Luke, and allusions to it in John. The account of the murder of John by Herod is found in the fourteenth chapter of Matthew, the sixth of Mark, and the third of Luke."

"Let us read," said the deacon, "the passage in the eleventh chapter of Matthew, which gives an account of John's sending two of his disciples to Jesus to inquire whether he were the Messiah or not. 'Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?' What did John mean by that question?"

"I suppose," said Townsend, "that he had some doubt in his mind as to whether Jesus were the Christ."



"How could that be?" asked the deacon. "He knew very well that Jesus was the Christ; for long before this (John i. 29-34) he had called Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, had seen the Holy Ghost descending on him, and plainly intimated to his disciples (John iii. 26, etc.) that Jesus *was* the Christ. He had made up his mind on that point long before."

"Perhaps," said the farmer, "his faith had failed."

"That seems unlikely," said I. "John was not the sort of man to doubt of a thing after he had once made up his mind about it. He was no reed to be shaken by the wind. He was one of those men whose convictions never falter."

"Then, perhaps," said Townsend, "he sent his disciples on their own account, that *their* faith in Jesus might be confirmed by what Jesus might say and do."

"That explanation," I replied, "has always seemed to me inconsistent with John's character. He was too straightforward a person to take such a roundabout way of coming at his object. He would have told his disciples to go

to Jesus and see for themselves; not to go as his messengers."

"I believe you are right," said Townsend. "If one tries to imagine John hesitating and doubting, or devising such a plan as this to assure his disciples, the absurdity becomes evident. But what *was* his motive, then? What *did* he mean?"

"I have no doubt," said I, "that he was dissatisfied with the course of Jesus, and meant to rebuke him. He was dissatisfied that Jesus was not doing the work of the Messiah in the way that he expected. He was looking for some triumphant display of power, by which the great multitudes whom he had roused were to be brought together, and to make Jesus a king, on the throne of his father, David. The cruel and time-serving Herod was to be deposed, the Romans driven out of the land. John himself, as one result, was to be rescued from prison. But, instead of this, he heard of Jesus going to and fro in Galilee, curing sick people, and preaching here and there in the fields. This was not doing the work of the Messiah as John understood that work. He had dared to rebuke the king on his throne for his vices; to command

armed soldiers to desist from their acts of violence: he would now even venture to tell the Messiah that he was doing his work negligently. 'Art thou he that should come, or shall we have to look for another?' That I take to be the meaning of his words. And this view, I believe, accords with his character and circumstances. He was in prison, and impatient of confinement. Accustomed to the free life of the desert, he could bear anything better than his compelled inactivity."

"This view," said Mr. Warland, "agrees with the answer of Jesus. He points out to John's disciples his works of love, as better evidence of the coming of the Messiah than any works of power. That the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, are the highest proofs that the Messiah is about his work. Blessed is he who can understand that; who is not offended by it, as John was; who can see Christ at hand wherever good is done."

"But did not Jesus mean to refer to these works because they were miracles?"

"I think not," said I; "for, if so, why should he have included among them that the poor had the gospel preached to them? He brought

them forward as works of mercy, in opposition to John's expectation of works of power."

"What you have said," observed Mr. Warland, "is also in accordance with the subsequent remarks of Jesus upon the character of John, which seem intended to excuse the rudeness of this message. Probably the disciples of Jesus expressed some displeasure with John for having sent such a message; but Jesus bade them consider the character of John and the nature of his work. Gentleness and courtesy are not to be expected from a man like John. His work was to prepare the way of the Messiah, by rousing the attention and breaking up the indifference of the Jewish mind. As the plough must go before the seed, as the fire must soften the wax to receive the impression of the seal, so John, a stern and awful prophet, must come first to rouse the nation from its deathlike lethargy. Such a work could only be done by a man who should have the spirit of Elijah,—terrible in his determined purpose, his fiery zeal, his inflexible persistency; a man 'unshaken, unseduced, unterrified.' A man clothed in soft raiment, a reed shaken by the wind, a civil and polite gentleman, would not have

carried those multitudes into the wilderness to see him. We must not expect to find every virtue in one man. John has energy, loyalty, constancy. Be satisfied with that, and excuse the absence of the deeper insight and the gentler spirit."

"But what is meant," said Deacon Herbert, "by the eleventh verse? 'Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist; notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.'"

"May it not mean," said Alice, "that John is the greatest prophet who has come in the spirit of Moses and of the law, but that the least of those who come in the spirit of the gospel is his superior? The phrase, 'born of women,' may be opposed to the phrase, 'born of God,' or 'of the Spirit.' It may imply that John was great, according to the spirit of the old covenant and past dispensation, which acted on men by the power of signs and wonders, terror and denunciation, driving them into the kingdom of heaven by force and fear. Jesus says in the twelfth verse, 'From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of

heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force.' But in the new covenant the motives are different. Not fear, but hope; not repulsion, but attraction; not hatred of evil, but love of good,— is the motive under the reign of Jesus, when the law is written in the heart, and the spirit given by which men say, 'Our Father.'"

"These explanations," said the doctor, "bring the whole passage into a beautiful connection. The opposition between the character, ideas, expectations, and merit of John and those of Jesus, is clearly indicated. So, in the next passage (i. 16-19), Jesus, by a comparison taken from the plays of children, who imitate rejoicings and mournings, weddings and funerals, shows the inconsistency of those who find fault with every kind of religious teacher. If a man is austere and ascetic, like John, they call him a fanatic or an enthusiast; if of a more liberal and cheerful spirit, like Jesus, 'he is a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber,' he is not serious enough. But 'Wisdom is justified of all her children.' Each has a merit of his own, and a work of his own; and each must do it in his own way."

"My business, *my* work," said the deacon,

“appears to be to suggest difficulties, and yours to resolve them. I will therefore ask how you can reconcile the fourteenth verse, ‘This is that Elias which was for to come,’ with John i. 21, in which John replies to those who asked if he was Elias, ‘I am not.’”

“The expression,” said the doctor, “‘if ye will receive it,’ seems to indicate that it is not to be taken literally.”

“And the passage,” said Townsend, “Luke i. 17, ‘He shall go before him in *the spirit and power* of Elias,’ shows that he was not to be Elias, but to have his character.”

“And it is remarkable,” said Mr. Warland, “how much John the Baptist resembled Elijah. Both were stern and austere prophets who feared not the face of man. Elijah reproved King Ahab to his face, as John the Baptist reproved Herod to his face. Elijah was persecuted by Jezebel, who sought his life, as John the Baptist was persecuted by Herodias, who succeeded in destroying him. John lived in the wilderness: so, also, did Elijah flee into the wilderness. Elijah in his cave, condemned to inactivity, became desponding and dispirited, as we have seen that John became dispirited, when condemned to inactivity in his prison. Elijah

and John seem to have made the same mistake in thinking that outward, apparent success was the only real success. Elijah was taught that the Lord was not in the whirlwind or the fire, but in the still, small voice. John the Baptist was taught that works of mercy and humanity were truer signs of the coming of Christ than miracles of power exerted to put down his enemies. Elijah must cast his mantle on Elisha, giving up his prophetic office to his successor, who was to have a double portion of his spirit; and John, in like manner, gave place to Jesus, who was to be greater than himself and to be preferred before him. And, finally, the work of Elijah and John was similar, both being great reformers, denouncing the immoralities of their age and preparing the way for a better epoch."

"One remark more I would make," said the deacon, "before we separate. We see in the history of John the Baptist how, in the order of Providence, nothing stands alone, but all things work together for the ordained results. Each man has his work to do in the great development of humanity. His place may appear small, but his work is not insignificant, as the smallest pin in the watch is essential to its correct movement. The way of Christ must be prepared be-



forehand. Among the Jews, the law and the prophets prepared his way. Among the Gentiles, all wise and good men prepared his way. He could not come until men were prepared by previous influences to understand and love his truth. The law was a schoolmaster to bring men to Christ. So, too, Socrates and Plato, Zeno and Epictetus, and all pure and generous souls, each in his place, helped to prepare the way, till the fulness of time was come; and then John the Baptist performed the last work of preparation, by awakening multitudes to a sense of their needs, and sending them to Jesus, who alone could satisfy those needs. Let us all take courage, then; for we each can do something at least to prepare the way for Christ's coming to some mind or heart. We can bring down the mountain of prejudice, we can fill up the valley of ignorance, we can smooth the rough places by a refining influence, and so remove the obstacles which stand in the path of the gospel; and happy is he who is not offended because his work is thus humble. Happy he who knows that the kingdom of heaven comes not with observation; not in the whirlwind, nor the fire, but in the still, small voice."

## VI.

### THE MIRACLES.

“THIS evening,” said Deacon Herbert, “our subject is the miracles of Jesus. It is a large subject and an intricate one. Moreover, it has been confused by recent disputes and discussions; and therefore, in order to come to any clear result, we must have a clear method by which to consider it. We must look at one thing at a time. I invite you to regard the miracles of Christ:—

“1. Historically— as matters of fact.

“2. Philosophically— as to their nature and laws.

“3. Theologically— as to their purpose and object.

“4. Spiritually— as to their inner meaning and spiritual significance.

“The miracles of Christ in the New Testament are spoken of as signs, wonders, and mighty works, and have three Greek words applied to them: *dunamis*, power, *semeion*, sign, and *teras*, wonder. They are works of wonder, or strange works,— works which indicate power,

and the purpose of which is to be a sign. They are of different kinds, but manifesting a power superior to anything ever known. In order to see this, it is only necessary to classify them; and I have requested Mr. Townsend to draw up such a classification, which he will read to us."

Townsend (reads from a paper):—

Class 1. *Miracles of Healing.* A variety of diseases is said to have been removed, sometimes by a word, sometimes by a touch, sometimes when Jesus was at a distance from the person healed, sometimes without his own intention or previous knowledge. Those born blind received their sight; the lame walked; a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years recovered his sight; the deaf heard; the dumb spake; fevers were removed; leprosy was cured; insane persons were restored at once to their right minds.

Class 2. *The Dead Raised.* Those dead to all appearance were, in three instances, restored: one, a maiden who had just expired; the second, a young man who was being carried out to be buried; the third, Lazarus, who had been buried four days.

Class 3. *Relating to Food.\** In the two instances of five thousand persons fed with five loaves and two fishes, leaving twelve baskets full of fragments, and the four thousand persons fed with seven loaves, leaving the seven baskets full. In this class, also, belongs the water changed to wine at the marriage-feast.

Class 4. *A Wonderful Influence over the Powers of Nature,*—as in stilling a storm, on one occasion, by a command addressed to the winds and waves, and in another walking upon the water.

Class 5. *An Influence upon Organic Life, Vegetable and Animal,*—as in the case of the fig-tree, withered by a command; the miraculous draught of fishes on two occasions; the herd of swine, and the fish with a piece of money in its mouth.

Class 6. *Miraculous Insight and Foresight.* Shown in his knowledge of Nicodemus; of the thoughts of Nathanael under the fig-tree; of the history of the Samaritan woman; of the character of Peter and Judas afterward shown by

\*The view which Mr. Clarke took of this event was that under the influence of Jesus those who had brought food with them shared freely with those who had none, and so there was 'ound enough and to spare.

the denial of the one and treachery of the other; of his own coming death and resurrection, the destruction of the temple, and other events which were to follow.

Class 7. *The Transfiguration, Resurrection, and Ascension* of Christ himself.

Class 8. *Supernatural Appearances* and events accompanying Jesus through his life, and indicating that the wall between this world and the higher world was broken through or weakened; angels appearing before his birth and after his death, and ministering to him in the most trying scenes of his life; voices and appearances from heaven,—the sun darkened at his death, earthquakes, and other similar signs.

One marked peculiarity of these miracles is that they were performed without an effort, and that there is no evidence that Jesus ever attempted to work a miracle and failed.

Deacon Herbert.—“Thank you, Mr. Townsend. Now, what evidence have we that these acts were really performed?”

Doctor Hunter.—“That of the four evangelists, two of whom, Matthew and John, were eye-witnesses; a third, Mark, is said to have been the companion of Peter, who was an eye-

witness; and the fourth, Luke, was a companion of Paul, and a contemporary of the apostles. These apostles differ enough from each other to show that the writers were independent witnesses, and did not copy from one another. They are sufficiently alike to show an agreement in all essentials. They have come to us from the earliest times in the shape in which they stand, and, moreover, they have been quoted and referred to by a succession of writers from the second century to the present time."

Deacon Herbert.—“But could not the stories of the miracles have been inserted in the Gospels afterward?”

The minister.—“The answer to that is that they are woven into the Gospels throughout, and we see no marks of insertion. They form part of the warp and woof. We might as well suggest that half of the figures in this carpet were woven in after the carpet was made. Besides, the miracles belong to the character of Christ, and are in perfect harmony with it; and, as Rousseau says, ‘he who could invent such a character would be more remarkable than the character himself.’”

“I believe,” said Mr. Warland, “that the opponents of Christianity in the earliest times never denied the miracles as matters of fact. They ascribed them to magic or to demons, but made no question of their reality. We question them, in our day, because our science, dwelling too exclusively on law and omitting love, has given us a dead universe instead of a living, mechanics instead of dynamics. To me, it seems altogether natural, and to be expected beforehand, that, when such a being as Christ came, the world should grow plastic around him; that his marvellous energy of soul should develop susceptibility in what we call dead matter; and that his life should make the world around him more living. It may seem a paradox, but I think that, without what we call the supernatural part, the Gospels would not be half as natural as they are.”

Deacon Herbert.—“It is not necessary for us to go farther with the argument for the reality of these facts, since none of us is disposed to doubt it. The evidence which we have is more than sufficient to prove them, unless there be the strongest antecedent objections to their possibility or probability. Impossible they cannot be,

since, even assuming them to be violations of law, the power of the Deity is adequate to suspend the laws of the material universe which he has made. Improbable they would only be, if their tendency and purpose are inconsistent with the providence of God. The objections to miracles are not historical, but philosophical. No one pretends that there is not ample evidence to prove them historically true, provided that they are philosophically probable. Let us then pass on to our second division, and consider miracles philosophically, according to their nature and laws. What *is* a miracle, and how is it defined?"

Townsend.—“The usual definition of a miracle is that it is a suspension of the laws of nature.”

Deacon Herbert.—“Then, before we can know that any phenomenon is a miracle, we must be perfectly acquainted with the laws of nature, else we cannot be sure that a law is really broken. The Arab prince who was told by the northern crusader that in his country the water became so hard as to support on its surface an armed knight on horseback, if he believed the story at all, would believe that the



laws of nature were violated, and that it was a miracle. Some years since, if we had been told that the air could be frozen solid and carried about in our hand, that our portrait could be drawn in a few seconds by the light of the sun, and that persons hundreds of miles distant could converse with each other by means of lightning, we should have believed all these things violations of the laws of nature, and miraculous. Now we know that in all these instances no law of nature is broken or suspended, but is overcome by the operation of some higher law. When I lift my arm, the law of gravitation is not violated or suspended, but overcome by a higher law or power, the law of life."

"Then," said Dr. Hunter, "you do not suppose the miracles of Jesus to have been violations of the laws of nature, but manifestations of a spiritual power in him, great enough to overcome, for the time, the better known laws."

"That is my opinion," said the deacon; "for I see no necessity of assuming that any law of nature was suspended, and we should make no such assumption unnecessarily. The permanence of law is one of the great features of the divine government and of the order of the uni-

verse. There is a profound instinct of the human reason which leads us to believe in the permanence of law; and, by means of this instinct, the human mind has made all its great discoveries, and all these discoveries are discoveries of law. The domain of law is continually being extended farther and farther. If we define a miracle as a violation of law, we make it offensive to human reason, and create an antecedent improbability against its occurrence. It is not so defined in the Bible, nor is it necessary to define it thus for the religious needs of our faith. The Bible, as we have seen, gives three names to these works of Jesus. They are 'wonders,' as regards their own character, 'mighty works,' as regards the power of the Being who wrought them, and 'signs,' as indicating the deep significance and profound religious importance of his mission."

"But do you consider them natural or supernatural works?" said Townsend.

"I believe them to have been both natural and supernatural," said the deacon,—"*supernatural*, as regards common nature and the common laws at work around us, but *natural*, as being manifestations of higher laws now at work in

higher worlds than this, and which may also be more widely operative in this world, when Christ's kingdom is fully established here. On the other hand, I deny that the works of Christ were either unnatural or preternatural."

Dr. Hunter.—"I like the explanation of miracles which rejects the view commonly taken of them as arbitrary interruptions of the laws of nature, and as lawless phenomena breaking into the world. I agree that the human mind tends naturally to look for law in all things. In fact, all *explanation* consists in bringing a thing under law. But, if a miracle is in accordance with law, even with higher law, then it must have its conditions and limitations."

Deacon Herbert.—"I admit it; and there are intimations of these conditions in the New Testament, as, for example, where faith is represented as necessary in order to their performance. 'Why could we not cast him out?' said the disciples. And Jesus answered, 'Because of your unbelief; howbeit, this kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.' Again, he says, 'Greater works than these shall ye do, because I go to my Father.' And, again, he tells them that, if they have faith but as a grain of mustard-seed,

they shall be able to do the most wonderful works."

Townsend.—“Do you mean to say, then, that one who has faith enough can work a miracle?”

Deacon Herbert.—“Undoubtedly, or Jesus would not have said so. But, then, remember that one cannot have faith whenever he chooses. Faith has its outward as well as its inward conditions. It is a gift of God as well as the work of man; and it is given by God according as it is required by the circumstances and needs of the individual and his time. A time may come in which miracles like those of Jesus, or greater works than those, will be necessary, and then, no doubt, they will be wrought. But here we will stop for to-day.”

## VII.

### THE MIRACLES OF JESUS — PART II.

“BEFORE we begin the discussion of our subject, which I believe,” said Dr. Hunter, “is the theological and spiritual view of miracles, I wish to ask a question of the class in regard to the objections urged against miracles, and the right way of meeting these objections. I know that many conscientious, good men have difficulties about them. What is the root of this difficulty, and how shall it be removed?”

“The objection to miracles,” said the minister, “has taken a different form at different periods. In the days of Jesus, his enemies do not appear to have questioned the reality of his wonderful works; but they attributed them to the power of demons, and so invalidated their weight as evidence of his mission. The difficulty, then, was not philosophical or scientific, but merely a personal objection to Jesus and his cause. At present, the case stands somewhat otherwise. Men who are willing to believe in Jesus, and who sympathize with his cause, cannot believe in his miracles. In the days of

Christ all extraordinary events were referred to spiritual agency: now we refer everything to mechanical agency. Spiritual beings have been banished from the earth into a distant heaven or hell; and nothing happens now, unless through gravitation, electricity, magnetism, or chemical affinity, by which names we conceal from ourselves our ignorance of the nature of elemental forces."

"But this modern objection to miracles," said the doctor, "takes different forms."

"Yes," said the minister: "those who deny the facts began by explaining away the language of the New Testament. Thus the tempter in the wilderness was a Jew sent by the Sanhedrim to sound Jesus. The large draught of fishes meant the Gentile converts. Angels are human messengers. Latterly, the miracles have become myths; that is, spontaneous poetry growing out of Old Testament recollections. But this mode of explanation, however ingenious, is too difficult in its application to succeed. Hence the need of getting at the root of the objection to miracles, which, as I believe, consists in our taking a mechanical view of nature rather than a spiritual view."

“All objections,” said the doctor, “as to their logical form, seem to resolve themselves at last into Hume’s, that ‘it is contrary to experience that miracles should be true, but not contrary to experience that witnesses should be mistaken.’”

“And yet,” said the minister, “how shallow this argument is! When he says that miracles are contrary to experience, he must either mean contrary to all experience or contrary to most experience. If he intends the first, he begs the question; for, if the miracles of Jesus be true, miracles are not contrary to all experience, and he has, therefore, to assume these to be false before the argument is founded. But if he intends that miracles are contrary to most experience,—that is, that they have never happened in any other case but this,—then his argument merely creates an antecedent improbability, which requires ample evidence of the fact, in order to remove it; and a like antecedent improbability will rest against every extraordinary event which has only occurred once in human history. It would have been thought improbable beforehand that a shower of stars should take place, like that which occurred in 1833.”

“But what is the right way of treating these

difficulties, when we find them existing in honest, truth-loving minds?"

"First, let us try to substitute a spiritual view of nature for the mechanical view; try to make men feel that God is in the world, and not outside of it; that God is a present Creator, and not merely a past Creator; that he is not only the Infinite Order of the universe, but the Infinite Freedom, too. Next, let us understand that Christianity does not rest upon miracles, but miracles upon Christianity; that a man who believes in Christ upon any ground, and endeavors to follow him, is a Christian, and that, therefore, one is not to suppose that he is bound to reject Christianity because he cannot see how to accept miracles. He is a Christian who looks to Jesus as the manifestation of God's truth, God's love, and God's will. One may believe this on the ground of miracles; another, on that of prophecy; another, on that of the character of Jesus himself; another, because of the effect which his life has had upon the world. If, on any such ground, one comes to take Jesus as Teacher, Master, Saviour, he is plainly a Christian."

Deacon Herbert.—"You have brought us,



very naturally, to our theological question, which regards the purpose of a miracle. What is the object of a miracle?"

Townsend.—“It is to prove the truth and the divine mission of Jesus, and to give authority to his teachings. The minister has justly said that miracles are not the only foundation of Christian belief, and that the building may stand firm, in many cases, without them; but they certainly are one foundation.”

Dr. Hunter.—“But how can a miracle prove the truth of a doctrine? What connection is there between power and truth? If a doctrine seems to me unreasonable, inconsistent with all I know of the nature of God and of man, how can a miracle lead me to believe in it?”

Townsend.—“The miracles of Christ are not intended to be proofs of the truth of his doctrine, but of the reality of his mission. They prove that God was with him; for only the power of God could enable him to do them. They prove the authority of Christ directly, and the truth of what he says indirectly, by means of that authority.”

“Still,” replied the doctor, “I do not see that an extraordinary display of power can prove the

divine authority of Jesus. Power is not always goodness. Evil beings have power as well as good beings. No doubt, if I could be sure that a man had accomplished a wonderful work, which he could only do by the power of God, then, indeed, I should know that God had set his seal to the truth of his mission. But this is just what I cannot know. I see a wonderful phenomenon: for example, a man apparently dead comes to life again. But, in the first place, my senses may deceive me, even though I myself were a witness of the fact: he may not have been really dead, but only apparently so. And, again, supposing him to have been really dead and brought to life by the power of the miracle-worker, am I sure that this is *divine* power? What do we know of the laws of life and death? Can we pronounce it an impossibility that life should return by some purely natural process? Certainly not, until we know what life and death are, of both of which we are profoundly ignorant. And when we add to this, in the third place, that the reports of these miracles have come to us from a distant land, and through eighteen centuries, there is another possibility of mistake. Do not understand me

as denying or doubting the reality of these transactions. I believe that they occurred essentially as related, and were performed by a divine power inherent in Jesus; but I believe this because I have first believed in Christianity. If Christianity seemed improbable, if Jesus did not appear divine in his character and truth, I do not think that the miracles would prove him to be so."

Townsend.—“But Jesus himself appeals to miracles as proofs of his mission. He says: ‘Believe me for the works’ sake’; ‘The works which the Father hath given me to do bear witness of me that the Father has sent me.’ So, too, his answer to John the Baptist’s messengers, in which he appeals to his miracles as evidence that he is the Messiah. So Peter, on the day of Pentecost, speaks of Jesus as ‘a man approved of God by miracles, wonders, and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you.’”

Dr. Hunter.—“May not Jesus have appealed to these works, not on account of their marvelous, but their benevolent character? He tells us that the tree is known by its fruits, and that the good tree is known by the quality of good-

ness in its fruit. And why, then, if it is the object of miracles to remove unbelief, are we told that Jesus, in a certain place, did not many mighty works, because of their unbelief? On your theory, that should have been the very place in which to do them. Why does he require faith *before* the miracle is performed, if the object of the miracle is to produce faith? Why, when people come asking for a sign, does he say that no sign shall be given them?"

Here the opponents paused, each having apparently no more to say, and, unlike most disputants, being willing to stop when they were at the end of their arguments. All seemed interested in the question, and waited for more light. I observed the deacon turn his eye to Mr. Warland, who had sat perfectly silent, resting his head on his hand during this argument. At length, observing the deacon's eye fixed upon him, he colored a little, but spoke:—

"Perhaps there is some truth in both of these views, though I do not know that I can reconcile them. A wrong view has been taken of miracles. Jesus never produced them, as a lawyer brings forward his arguments, to convince a doubting audience of his claims. His object

was, first, to do good ; and his miracles were (as Mr. Furness states) the natural expression of his benevolent character. But, secondly, he wished by his miracles to draw attention to himself, and thus to his truth ; to gain for himself an audience and an opportunity ; and, thirdly, he wished by his miracles to convince those who were ready to be convinced, who, loving the truth he taught, wished to believe it divine. But he did not wish to convince them in the way of logic. The miracles are not addressed to the lower understanding, but to the whole spiritual nature. They show the supremacy of soul over body, mind over matter, the spiritual over the material ; they show that those laws of nature which appear to us the most constant and universal may be modified in their action by other laws which we do not now understand."

"Then," said Alice, "the object of the miracles was rather spiritual than logical. It was to help and strengthen the principle of faith where it already existed in a longing, seeking soul."

The minister.—"That a miracle can only be of use where there is a spiritual preparation, and that on this account Jesus demanded faith

in the recipient, will appear from the fact that nobody was convinced but those who were thus prepared. The Sadducees were not convinced by the raising of Lazarus. They thought it a trick. How *could* they think otherwise, with their belief?"

"And so," said I, "the words of Jesus were verified: 'If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rise from the dead.' Lazarus did rise from the dead, and some of the Jews who saw it believed; but others went their way to the Pharisees and told them of it."

"I could never understand," said the widow, "how it was that those who saw such miracles did not believe in them."

"Because," said the deacon, "we see not what is before our eye, but what is behind it. Our own prejudices and opinions pass through our eye into the fact, and transform it. The Jews who believed Jesus an enthusiast, a disorganizer, a fanatic, a dangerous man, looked at the miracle, and saw in it a trick, an audacious imposition, a blasphemous pretence. Holding the same opinions of any man, we should think the same of what we saw him do, were it ever

so marvellous. Therefore, you see, all depends upon what we think of the man and of his cause. If we think well of him, the wonder is surrounded with a divine glory; if we think evil of him, it is shrouded in gloom and darkness."

"Hence," said the minister, very earnestly, "we see the need of faith in the value of the human soul. Jesus came to save souls from sin. He who feels the importance of that will easily believe that the whole power of God should attend him in this work; but who feels the importance of it? Only he to whom sin seems worse than death and hell, holiness better than the outward universe, will believe that all forces should be under the control of the Being sent by God to do this work."

"Let us take that thought home," said the deacon. "Enough for to-night."

## VIII.

### THE TWELVE.

“THE subject,” said Deacon Herbert, “is the twelve apostles. We have four lists: Matthew x. 2; Mark iii. 14; Luke vi. 13; and Acts i. 13. The order in which they stand is a little different in these four catalogues; but, in all, Peter, James, John, and Andrew come first; Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, and Matthew next; and in the third class stand James, the son of Alphaeus, Simon Zelotes, or the Canaanite, Thaddeus, as he is called in Matthew and Mark, or, as he is called in Luke and the Book of Acts, Judas, the brother of James; and at the end of the list stands, very naturally, the traitor, Judas Iscariot.”

“It has often struck me as remarkable,” said Townsend, “that of most of the apostles we should hear so little except their names. Of Peter, James, and John, much is said; but of the rest scarcely anything.”

“Take the Concordance,” said Deacon Herbert, “and let us see how often they are mentioned.”



Townsend.—“I will first look for Andrew. I find it said that he was the first of John the Baptist’s disciples who came to Jesus (John i. 40); that he brought his brother Peter to Jesus (verse 41); that he was the first called by Jesus from his nets to be an apostle, with his brother Peter, and he seems to have been the first who said that Jesus was the Messiah. He is mentioned in three other places, in a way that shows that he stood in somewhat nearer relation to Jesus than the rest; but of his apostolic labors we know nothing from the Gospels or the Acts.”

“What do you find said of Philip?” asked the deacon.

“Only this: that he was called by Jesus (John i. 43); that he belonged to Bethsaida, where Peter and Andrew lived; that he told Nathanael that he had found the Christ; and when Nathanael asked, ‘Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?’ replied, ‘Come and see.’ In John xiv. 8, he says, ‘Lord, show us the Father.’ But, except in the catalogue of apostles, he is not mentioned in the Book of Acts.”

“I find,” said Dr. Hunter, “that Thaddeus is mentioned only once; that very little is re-

ported, except their names, of Bartholomew, Simon, Matthew, and James; and of Thomas Didymus only two things. It seems to me curious that the Book of Acts should record *so little* concerning the greater number of the apostles."

"Yet, I cannot think," said Townsend, "that any of those who were selected by Jesus to be his apostles could have been inactive men. Perhaps this shows us that men who live and die in silence, who have no gift of utterance, may yet be capable of great usefulness. That which is the most talked about may not always be the most useful. Perhaps each of the apostles may have done a great and noble work, though an unrecorded one; and it may be a comfort to those who have no unusual power of expression that so many of the great apostles of Christ should have lived and died without having uttered anything which has been considered by the writers of the New Testament worth recording."

"One thing they did at least," said Mr. Warland, "which showed the depth and strength of their character. *They left all to follow Jesus.* This was the one condition of being a disciple, and this they fulfilled. Ignorant as they were

of the true character of Christ, they yet willingly made one great sacrifice. And great was their reward, not only in heaven, but also on earth. Humble and illiterate as they were, Jesus saw that they were capable of this, and so he chose *them*; while the wise Nicodemus, the learned Gamaliel, and the illustrious Joseph of Arimathea were passed by. If they had no other reward, to enjoy the society of Jesus was reward enough. They took the place of his mother and brethren to him: they became his intimate associates, and the founders of his Church."

"You suggest an interesting question," said the deacon. "What principle of selection did Jesus follow in choosing these twelve apostles? He must have seen something in their character and disposition to determine the selection. 'He knew what was in man,' and in so important a matter as this he could not have acted without good reason."

"If we may infer," said Alice, "his intention from the result, we might say that he proposed to include in the apostolic company a great variety of character and tendency. We find that those of them with whom we are acquainted differ from each other."

“And, therefore,” said the minister, “were better fitted to do the whole work which was to be done, and to see all sides of the truth. Jesus himself was a perfectly proportioned, complete, and harmonious character, but his disciples must have been more or less one-sided and imperfect; and so it was necessary to have for his apostles men of different characters. For example, two of the apostles, Matthew and John, have written Gospels. But how different are these Gospels! and different because each author presents his own view of Jesus. Matthew saw, understood, and remembered one class of incidents; John, another. Matthew gives an external view; John, a more interior view. Each one reports what his own capacity enabled him to see and comprehend.”

“If you will allow me,” said Alice, “to use an illustration: in Jesus the truth shone as a pure, white ray; but, in entering the minds of his disciples, it was necessarily refracted by each one’s native obliquity, and so broken into colors. It was important, then, that each color should be represented by some individual, and thus the whole ray of truth be preserved. If you will allow me to pursue this figure, we may remark

in the three leading apostles three of the colors of this spiritual spectrum. Peter is represented by the color of *fire*,—the fire of zeal and faith. James, the teacher of practical duty, of earthly virtue, of household goodness (surnamed, as tradition informs us, the Just), is the refreshing *green* of earth; and John, in his lofty aspiration, in his spiritual and almost mystic tone of elevated piety, may well be symbolized by that deep *blue* which is the color of the profoundest heaven.”

“But why,” said Dr. Hunter, “was Judas chosen to be a disciple? That is a point which has sometimes troubled me; for it seems as if Jesus must have known that he would prove a traitor.”

“That is a difficult question,” said the deacon, “to be sure. But let us see what you can make of it.”

“If Jesus had been *certain* that Judas would betray him, it would seem as though, in choosing him and placing him in the situation where he would have the opportunity to commit the crime, Jesus himself were an accessory to it. That is one difficulty which has troubled me,” said the doctor.

“But there is no reason,” said the minister, “for thinking that Jesus had any such *certainty*, or could have. Judas had the power of becoming either a faithful disciple or a traitor. No doubt, if he had been faithful, he would have been most useful; for he was no commonplace character. In choosing him as a disciple, Jesus offered him a great opportunity, and at the same time exposed him to a great temptation. But that is always the case. Every great opportunity implies a great risk.”

“But was it not a bad thing for Judas, with his evil tendencies, to be exposed to such a temptation?”

“I do not know that,” said the minister. “If the evil were in him, perhaps it was as well for him that it should come out. If this evil were in his heart, it may have been better for him that, by its developing into action, he should become aware of it. However, there are difficulties connected with this point which I do not feel able to explain. But I believe that Judas *might* have acted differently, and in that case would have assisted to accomplish the purposes of God directly, by his good qualities, as, in fact, he indirectly accomplished them by his crime.”

“Let us next ask,” said Deacon Herbert, “what the apostles were chosen to do. What was their office?”

“It was, I suppose,” said Dr. Hunter, “to go about with Jesus, hear what he said, and see what he did, that they might afterward be witnesses of what they had seen and heard. In the Book of Acts, when the place of Judas was to be supplied, and one to be chosen in his place to make up the number of the twelve, Peter says, ‘Wherefore, of these men, which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.’”

“In looking,” said Townsend, “in the Book of Acts at the first sermons preached by the apostles, I have observed that they contain a fact, a doctrine, a duty, and a promise. They announce the fact of Christ’s resurrection. By this they prove the doctrine that he is the Christ, the Son of God. The duties commanded are repentance, faith, baptism, obedience; and the reward promised is the gift of forgiveness and the Holy Ghost. This seems to have been

the whole of the primitive gospel, as announced by the apostles; and their mission was to go into all the world and preach this gospel to every creature."

"You speak of the twelve as though their office were merely that of preachers," said the minister. "But had they not a special commission and a special authority besides?"

Deacon Herbert.—"Explain yourself, if you please, on that point."

"I find," said the minister, "four special gifts with which they were endowed, as follows:—

"1. Miraculous powers and gifts.

"2. The keys of the kingdom of heaven.

"3. Power to forgive sins.

"4. Inspiration.

"Under the first head I find (Matthew x. 8) that, when they were first chosen, they were told, 'Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils; freely ye have received, freely give'; and (in Mark iii. 14, 15) that Jesus 'ordained twelve that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils.' Under the second head, I find (Matthew xvi. 19) that Jesus tells Peter: 'I



will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth, shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth, shall be loosed in heaven'; and (in Matthew xviii. 18) the same commission is given, with the same authority, to all the apostles. Under the third head, I find (John xx. 22) that after the resurrection Jesus said to the apostles: 'Receive ye the Holy Ghost. Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.' And, as regards the fourth point, I would refer to all those passages in the Gospel of John in which Jesus promised the apostles that he would send them the Holy Spirit, or the Spirit of Truth, to lead them into all truth."

Deacon Herbert.—"These are certainly striking and important passages, and have generally been believed to prove that a special power and authority was given to the apostles. But let us examine if this be true. Suppose that we should find that this same power and authority were given to every Christian. What would follow then?"

The minister.—"It would follow that the pre-

eminence of the apostles consists only in their being the first recipients of this power; in being the channel through which it is communicated to others, and perhaps in possessing it in greater depth and fulness. But can this be shown?"

Townsend.—“It can be shown as regards the first gift, that of miracles; for we read (Mark xvi. 17): ‘These signs shall follow them that believe. In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; they shall take up serpents; and, if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them. They shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover.’\* So, also (Luke x. 9-17), we read that Jesus authorized the seventy whom he sent out ‘to heal the sick’; and, when they returned, they said that ‘even the devils were subject to them.’ The power of miracles, therefore, was not confined to the twelve.”

Doctor Hunter.—“And certainly the same is true of the gift of the Holy Ghost, and the knowledge of truth which it communicated. For instance, the apostle John says to Chris-

\*The revised version says, “The two oldest Greek manuscripts, and some other authorities, omit from verse 9 to the end.”

tians generally, 'Ye have an unction (or christening) from the Holy One, and ye know all things,' and 'need not that any man teach you.'"

The minister.—“But, granting that these two gifts were not peculiar to the apostles, can the same be said of the other two,—the keys, and the power to forgive sin?”

Deacon Herbert.—“What do you understand by this power of the keys?”

The minister.—“The power of admitting into the Church, or excluding from it. To bind and loose, I suppose, means to shut and open, as the doors in ancient times were fastened with ropes.”

“Do you suppose,” said the deacon, “that this power of excluding from the Church below is followed always by exclusion from heaven, and the reverse?”

The minister.—“Not unless the person who admits or excludes another is infallible, and can know certainly the condition of another's heart. Even the Church of Rome does not pretend that its excommunication from the earthly Church is always followed by excommunication from heaven.”

“Then,” said the deacon, “this cannot be the true explanation; for our Saviour says that what his disciples bind on earth is bound in heaven.”

“That is true,” said the minister; “and, besides, if the keys mean the authority to admit or exclude from the visible Church, that authority is necessarily not confined to the apostles, for somebody, in every age, must have this authority. But what, then, do you yourself understand by the keys?”

The deacon.—“Not the authority to admit or exclude from the visible external Church, but the power of admitting or not admitting into the invisible and real Church. The keys are those deep convictions of truth which, by being expressed, produce like convictions in the minds of others, but, if not expressed, leave them destitute of faith, and therefore away from Christ. If I am right, it is clear that the keys are possessed by all Christians in proportion to the depth and clearness of their convictions of truth. But, in any case, you see that the gift of the keys could not have been confined to the apostles. It was transmitted to their successors; and the question is, merely, Who were

their successors? Some say, The popes; others say, The bishops or clergy; I say, *All real Christians.*"

The minister.—“But what shall we say of the other gift, that of forgiving sin?”

The deacon.—“Precisely the same thing. No one claims, not even the Roman priest, that he has the power of forgiving sin, except where the sinner has true penitence and faith. But every one else, surely, can forgive sin in the same way. Each one of us may tell a man that God forgives him his sin, if he is truly penitent. But we can only make him believe it in proportion to our own faith. He who has the strongest faith in God’s forgiving love has, therefore, the most of the apostles’ power of forgiving sins.”

Townsend.—“You seem to give a new view of the question of apostolic succession. You believe those are the successors of the apostles who succeed to their powers, and that all Christians can be the successors of the apostles in this way.”

“Exactly so,” said the deacon. “Those only can succeed to the apostles’ *office* who inherit their powers. For what is an office but a duty;

and how is duty determined except by ability? Wherever ability is given by God, there is also duty imposed,—nowhere else.”

Mr. Warland.—“It seems that the only thing which was peculiar to the office of an apostle was to be a witness of Christ’s resurrection; and this is the one thing which could not be transmitted, and in which they could have no successors.”

Townsend.—“And, on the other hand, the prerogative which bishops consider to have been transmitted to themselves, and in which they regard themselves to be especially the successors of the apostles, is the one thing never spoken of in the New Testament as belonging to the apostles at all; namely, that of ordaining priests or ministers.”

Deacon Herbert.—“There is one point more which interests me in regard to the apostles. We have seen that their characters were very different, and that they make up a unity in variety,—a concord of different sounds. Thus they were able to see and manifest all sides of Christian truth. But thus, also, they represent every future tendency of the Christian Church,—every one, I mean, which is based in a real

need of our nature or an actual sight of truth. Every great party in the Church has its head and leader in the company of the apostles. We may each of us say with truth, and in a good sense, 'I am of Paul, I am of Peter, I am of John.' This view furnishes a remedy for exclusiveness. Paul, the theologian, who believed in Faith, did not excommunicate James, the practical apostle, who believed in Works. Peter did not denounce his brother Paul for having many things in his Epistles hard to be understood. None of them called John a mystic or a pantheist, or objected to the Epistle of James as a mere moral essay."

Dr. Hunter.—"I am glad to see that the Rationalists and Naturalists also have a leader in the Church in Thomas Didymus, who wished to put his fingers into the print of the nails, and needed material evidence in order to believe. I am a little inclined to take Saint Thomas for my own leader. I have a tendency toward the same kind of doubt; and it is consoling to see that Thomas was not excommunicated for his unbelief, but that his Master gave him the evidence for which he asked."

"Very true," said the deacon: "let us be as charitable to each other as the apostles were."

## IX.

### NICODEMUS AND THE NEW BIRTH — PART I.

THIS evening, at the Bible-class, Deacon Herbert read to us the third chapter of John, which contains the account of the visit of Nicodemus, and the conversation of Jesus with him concerning the New Birth, preceded by the verses in the second chapter which state that Jesus knew what was in man, possessing that knowledge of men's inward motives and thoughts which is illustrated in the course of this conversation. When he had read the chapter, he said, "What did Jesus mean by saying to Nicodemus, in the third verse, 'Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'?"

Dr. Hunter.—"He meant to say that to become his disciple implied a great change. It was like beginning a new life. He saw, perhaps, that Nicodemus did not appreciate how great this change would be, and that, although he was a good man, and recognized that there was something divine about Jesus, and admitted that he was a teacher from God, he wished to derive



benefit from his instruction, without giving up the advantages of his present position. He could not 'give up all' to follow Jesus, and therefore could not become his disciple."

Mr. Warland.—“His case, then, seems parallel to that of the young man who was very rich, and whom Jesus directed to sell all he had, and give to the poor. The sacrifice required in the one case was that of riches; in the other, that of influence, position, and a well-earned reputation. They were both 'not far from the kingdom of heaven'; but, to *enter into it*, they must both leave their old life behind them, and begin a new one. They were both *possessed* by their possessions,—held fast by what they held,—and were unequal to the effort.”

Deacon Herbert.—“What do we know about the position of Nicodemus?”

Townsend.—“From John iii. 1, it appears that he was a Pharisee, and a ruler of the Jews. From John vii. 50, it appears that he was one of the great Council, and that he claimed for Jesus, in the Council, the right of trial according to the law; and, from John xix. 39, that at the time of the death of Jesus he was probably a secret disciple, like Joseph of Arimathea,

whom he assisted in embalming the body of Jesus. I find that Olshausen remarks in his commentary, 'We may suppose Nicodemus to have been a pure, earnest, true-minded man, standing on the basis of the law, who perceived something elevated in Jesus, was moved by the miracles, but hardly knew what to think of him.'"

Alice.—“He was a sort of Mr. Feeble-Mind, perhaps; a little timid, and somewhat undecided.”

Dr. Hunter.—“As all men are apt to be who have anything to lose. It is property which makes us cowards, whether it be in the form of money, or of reputation, or of carefully formed opinions. Conservatism is necessarily timid, whatever be the object we seek to conserve.”

Mr. Warland.—“Do you think it possible, then, that a man who has no stock of goodness, or virtuous habit, may sometimes show more courage in following an inward call of God than a better man?”

“Possibly,” said Deacon Herbert. “We do not like to lose anything which has cost us trouble; least of all, reputation, influence, a good name. But what is the meaning of the

new birth? What is it to be born again, or to be born from above? for I find, by my 'Englishman's Greek Concordance,' that the word here translated 'again' also means 'from above.' The same word, in fact, is used in the thirty-first verse of this chapter, and is there translated 'from above.' 'He that cometh from above, is above all'; and also James i. 17; iii. 15-17."

The minister.—“There are two theories on this subject, which seem to be exactly opposite to each other. The first is that of the Roman Catholics, and, I believe, of the early Church, and also that of the High Church Episcopalians,—that regeneration is the same thing as baptism. Regeneration, they think, is the coming into outward communion with the Church, and becoming a member of the same through baptism, which is accompanied, however, by some inward, mysterious grace. This view is supported by Titus iii. 5, where the “washing of regeneration” is spoken of. The other view, held by orthodox Protestants, considers regeneration to be an inward change, produced by the power of truth and the influence of the Holy Spirit. This view is supported by 1 Peter i. 23,

where this change is ascribed to "the Word of the living God."

Townsend.—"These two views seem, indeed, to be opposed to each other."

The minister.—"But in this passage Jesus seems to unite and adopt both views. It is to be 'born of water and of the Spirit.' It is outward and inward,—a new inward life fed by God in the soul, and a new outward life beginning with baptism."

Townsend.—"He mentions water, to be sure, in the fifth verse; but in the sixth and the eighth he lays the whole stress on being born of the Spirit."

Mr. Warland.—"Exactly so,—which shows that the inward change is the essential one. The principle of the new life is the influence of God's Spirit in the heart; but this principle must be manifested outwardly in baptism, or in whatever way it can best express itself."

Deacon Herbert.—"So, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus lays the greatest stress on inward goodness, happiness, and religion, and yet says, 'Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works.'"

The minister.—"Christianity is a new life.

It is an eternal life, or a life of God, abiding within us. It is to the soul what the soul itself is to the body,—the principle of activity and growth. This new life has its beginning, or birth, which is regeneration. It has its food, or nourishment, which is the life of Christ, loved, understood, and imitated. We might add other analogies, were it necessary.”

Townsend.—“What Nicodemus needed was the inward change, I suppose,—to be born of the Spirit. He was a good man, but he needed a new inward principle,—a principle of love and life.”

Dr. Hunter.—“But he needed the outward change, too, did he not? He was afraid to confess Jesus openly, and he needed to take that step before he could obtain the inward life. We must be willing to do our duties if we expect spiritual aid from above.”

Townsend.—“But the aid must come first, or how could he obtain strength to do his duty? What he needed was a new spirit of faith and courage; an inward change first, then the outward change would come.”

Dr. Hunter.—“No. It is plain that the thing which kept him back was that he was

unwilling to make an open confession of his faith. The outward step taken, the inward life would come."

Deacon Herbert.—“We seem to have the Catholic and the Protestant view of regeneration, even in our own Bible-class. We will resume this subject at our next meeting.”

## X.

### REGENERATION — PART II.

WHEN we had all taken our places this evening, Deacon Herbert said: "In our discussion, I will adopt the following method of division. Let us ask:—

"1. What is it to be born again?

"2. What must we do to be born again?

"3. How shall we know that we are born again?

"In other words, let us consider the *nature*, the *means*, and the *evidences* of the new birth. And, first, I will ask Dr. Hunter, What is regeneration?"

Dr. Hunter.—"For the present, at least, my answer shall be this: To become a member of the Christian Church by baptism, with all which this naturally implies. It implies, of course, that one should believe in Christianity as a religion from God. It implies that one should wish to become a Christian, should wish to lead a Christian life. But *belief* in Christianity and the *wish* to lead a Christian life do not make a man a Christian till he *begins* to lead this life.

The first step which he takes is the beginning. This first step is an outward profession, or expression, or confession of his intention. But, in order to express his purpose, he must do it in a way which people will understand. If he should announce his purpose in an unknown tongue, he would not be understood, and of course his confession would be no confession. Now, in the vernacular language of Christianity, baptism is the rite which expresses clearly to all men this purpose of becoming a Christian. This, therefore, is regeneration."

Townsend.—“But suppose a man is baptized and stops there, being no better than he was before, as has been the case a thousand times, both in heathen and Christian countries: what then?”

Dr. Hunter.—“Then it is evident that his regeneration is of no use to him. He has begun the journey, but has stopped on the way: nevertheless, the journey is begun.”

Townsend.—“You say that the outward act of being baptized implies that a man believes in Christianity and intends to be a Christian. Usually, perhaps, but not necessarily. Suppose he is a hypocrite or an infidel, and is baptized



merely for the sake of some temporal advantage. Is his baptism in that case the beginning of a Christian life or not?"

Dr. Hunter.—“I think it is. He has taken the first right step. No matter what his motive is, so far he has done well. This first step may lead him to take a second. It may be the means of his acquiring the faith and the heart which he needs. At all events, it is the first step, consequently the beginning of the Christian life, consequently regeneration.”

Townsend.—“But you said that baptism was the understood expression of Christian faith. If that faith does not exist, then he who is baptized says something which is not true, and baptism is simply telling a lie. Now I ask, Can a lie be the first step in the Christian life? You say the hypocrite, when baptized, has done at least one good thing. Is telling a lie doing a good thing?”

Dr. Hunter.—“I see clearly that, if I am to maintain my position, I must give up the out-works, and fall back upon the fortress. I give up to you the inward part of baptism. I say nothing about its meaning. I say, simply, that we are commanded to be baptized; and that,

therefore, being baptized is a right thing in itself, apart from any meaning attached to it. Just so it is right to pay our debts, no matter what our motive is. Baptism is right *per se*, simply because it is commanded; and thus we may justify the baptism of children, who, of course, have no faith to express."

Townsend.— "You regard it, then, as a duty, merely because it has been commanded; but, if so, he who obeys it must believe that it has been commanded, and that by divine authority. Therefore, he must believe in Christianity."

Dr. Hunter.— "Then I must maintain that it is something good in itself, and has some inherent power to help us, no matter what be our motive in being baptized."

The minister.— "You thus have been driven, quite logically, to take the ground of the Roman Catholic Church, which regards baptism as a sacrament, and an *opus operatum*, conveying grace to the soul by some inherent and mysterious power, and hence follows, as logically, that those kings were the best missionaries who conquered the heathen nations, and compelled them to be baptized on pain of death. According to this theory, such converts became real Chris-

tians, and were truly regenerate. But this makes of baptism a mere magical ceremony, and regeneration a thing of no consequence; for such converts are like infants which die as soon as they are born. They lose their Christianity as soon as they receive it."

Dr. Hunter.—“Why so, if Christianity be a system of religious education and moral culture, and if the Christian Church be a school for spiritual education? We send unwilling children to school; and, though they go unwillingly, yet they learn when there.”

The minister.—“The doctor has stated very strongly the arguments for baptismal regeneration. This theory makes of the Christian Church a discipline, a school, a system of external influences. So far, it is good; but it destroys freedom. It omits personal responsibility, and therefore leads necessarily to spiritual despotism on the one side and moral weakness on the other.”

Deacon Herbert.—“What, then, is *your* answer to the question? What is it *to be born again?*”

The minister.—“It is the beginning of inward life in the soul; the beginning of real

faith, penitence, and love. It is the change from the death of sin to the life of righteousness."

Townsend.—“But have we not *always* some good feelings and desires in the soul? If regeneration is *beginning* to feel right, is not everybody regenerate? for does not every one feel rightly at some time or other?”

The minister.—“I understand by it beginning to live with the permanent purpose of serving God and man. We are not children of God till we begin to live from this motive.”

Townsend.—“And is it in the power of all to live so, or is it not? Can one who has never heard of God or of Christ do this?”

The minister.—“No; but every one born and brought up in Christian lands may.”

Townsend.—“It would seem, then, that we need outward Christian helps and influences to lead inwardly a Christian life. These outward helps are the Christian Church again in one form or another. It would seem, then, that we ought to combine the idea of the minister with that of the doctor.”

Deacon Herbert.—“How, then, do you define regeneration?”

Townsend.—“It is ‘to be born of water and of the spirit.’ It is to begin a new inward life of love, which must necessarily show itself (or express itself, as the doctor had it) in an outward life of obedience. It must be a life that is something permanent; not transient good feelings or transient good actions, but adherence to one fixed idea; adopting one permanent aim; living from God for man.”

Deacon Herbert.—“I think our question has now received every answer which can be given. To be born again is to begin the Christian life. According to the doctor, this beginning of the Christian life was an outward action alone. According to the minister, it was an inward feeling or sentiment alone. According to Mr. Townsend, it was both an outward act and an inward idea. There can be no other definition which will not fall under one of these three classifications. Now, we have seen that the outward act by itself is not enough, and, in like manner, that an inward feeling by itself is not enough; but that combined they act and react upon each other as the twofold elements of real life. The new birth, then, is the beginning of a new outward life, guided by new

inward convictions and motives. But let us now ask, What must we do to be born again? and this question we shall leave for our next meeting."\*

\* The continuation of this subject does not appear in these chapters, but Mr. Clarke's ideas may be found in the fifth lecture in "Essentials and Non-essentials in Religion."

## XI.

### THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

DEACON HERBERT read to us, this evening, a short essay upon the Sermon on the Mount, translated by our friend, the Cambridge scholar, George Classic, from some German writer, I believe Dr. Hase, who has written a Life of Jesus. He compares the Sermon on the Mount, as it stands in the fifth, sixth, and seventh chapters of Matthew, with the discourse contained in the sixth chapter of Luke, and, after weighing the arguments for and against their identity, concludes that both the evangelists intended to give an account of the same discourse, the one which was delivered near Capernaum. He thinks, however, that, with the intention of giving a picture of Jesus as a teacher, they may have collected around what they remembered of this particular discourse other sayings of Jesus, which were uttered at different times. He does not consider this to be an ordination sermon, on the occasion of inaugurating the twelve, nor to have been addressed to his disciples exclusively, but through them to the nation, and to all

Chritendom, and to be, as it were, the *Magna Charta*, or religious Constitution, of the Kingdom of Heaven. He describes the contents of the sermon thus:—

Introduction.—Addressed to those feeling their spiritual needs, and longing for a kingdom of love (Matt. v. 1–16).

Part 1.—The relation of the Kingdom of Heaven to the Jewish Theocracy, described in general, and with single illustrations, as the contrast of inward and external righteousness (Matt. v. 16–48).

Part 2.—The contrast of Christian obedience and Pharisaic righteousness, in almsgiving, fasting, and prayer (Matt. vi. 1–18).

Part 3.—The temporal and the eternal: the supreme value of the latter, resulting, when made the aim of life, as joyful activity in the former (Matt. vi. 18–34).

Part 4.—Miscellaneous truths and precepts (Matt. vii. 1–12).

Conclusion.—Practical application. The necessity of changing all theory into love and action.

Hase admits that, as Jesus did not discover or invent the moral law, some similar truths



may be found in the teachings of wise men in former days. He thinks it pedantic or fanatical to take all the precepts of Christ literally, and does not consider the Sermon on the Mount as containing the whole of Christianity, but only one side of it.

Having read this essay, Deacon Herbert said, "What do you think of the account just given of the contents of the Sermon on the Mount?"

Mr. Warland.—"Here is another, a little different, which I once drew up for a Sunday-school lesson":—

#### ANALYSIS OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT.

Its subject, the spiritual nature of Christianity.

1. True happiness is from within; the state of the heart (Matt. v. 1-12).
2. But must shine out in the life (13-20).
3. Duty is also within,—rules the heart (20-48).
4. And based on religion, which must also be inward (vi. 1-18).
5. And must be supreme (19-24).
6. For outward things, repose on God (25-34).
7. For inward blessings, pray to God (vii. 7-11).
8. The evidence of true faith is the Life (12-23).
9. Its end is security or peace (24-27).

Dr. Hunter.—"I should say that the subject of the Sermon on the Mount is the importance

of practical goodness, as opposed to doctrines and ceremonies. It is the text-book of practical Christianity. There is nothing in it about sacraments, or ceremonial religion; nothing about popes or bishops; nothing about Sabbaths, churches, or festivals. Even public worship seems rather to be condemned than recommended. None of the doctrines of the creeds are even alluded to in this sermon. No controversialist can get a text out of it for or against the Trinity, total depravity, the atonement, three orders in the ministry, infant baptism, or adult baptism, and the like. All is practical; all goes to life and action."

Alice.—"I was just going to say that I thought the subject of the sermon to be a statement of the intuitive, inward, transcendental nature of goodness. The doctor thinks the Sermon on the Mount makes Christianity all outward. It seems to me that it makes it all inward. I should call this sermon the text-book of the Transcendentalists."

"To me it has appeared to be the text-book of reformers," said I. "It is very radical. Socialists may quote the blessings on the poor, and the woes pronounced on the rich, in Luke. The

Non-resistants may quote the passages in Matt. v. 39 and the following verses. Come-outers may quote the text, 'When thou prayest, enter into thy closet.' Those who object to taking oaths find their argument in the words, 'Swear not at all.' And those who think it wrong to hold property may quote the passage, 'Lay not up treasures on earth.'"

Deacon Herbert.—"And yet the conservatives might find arguments in this sermon for their opinions likewise, in those passages where Jesus says he has 'not come to destroy' anything, and that no one must break 'the least of the commandments,' or teach others to do so, till they are fulfilled entirely; that is, replaced by something better. Dr. Hunter thinks the sermon all practical; but what stress it lays on the state of the heart and the will! Our sister Alice thinks it transcendental; but how far it is from mysticism! How wholly at home among the things of actual, common, social life! Yet I think I could find in it a basis for doctrines also. On the whole, it seems to me that this sermon contains the two sides of human life in their true equipoise: the inward and the outward; the ideal and the actual; the life

of God in the soul, showing itself in a life of usefulness in all human relations."

Townsend.—“I am impressed, in reading this discourse, with its manner quite as much as its matter. I understand why it should be said at the close that ‘the people were astonished; for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the Scribes.’ It is different from all other teaching. There is nothing of theory, of opinion, of speculation, of argument, of demonstration, of rhetoric. It is a pure statement of spiritual facts; of the highest truth seen clearly in distinct outline, and described as one might describe a tree or a house before his eyes. Jesus seems to have spoken out of his heart and inward life; and never was a life deep and rich as his in spiritual insight. It is ‘the Son of man who is in heaven,’ who comes out of heaven to teach us what is there. He ‘comes down from heaven,’ as the thought which we utter comes out of the mind, and yet remains in the mind, too. The greatest teachers of the world seem only theorizers and speculators beside him.”

Mr. Warland.—“This view I had not taken. I supposed that his teaching ‘with authority’ meant official authority.”

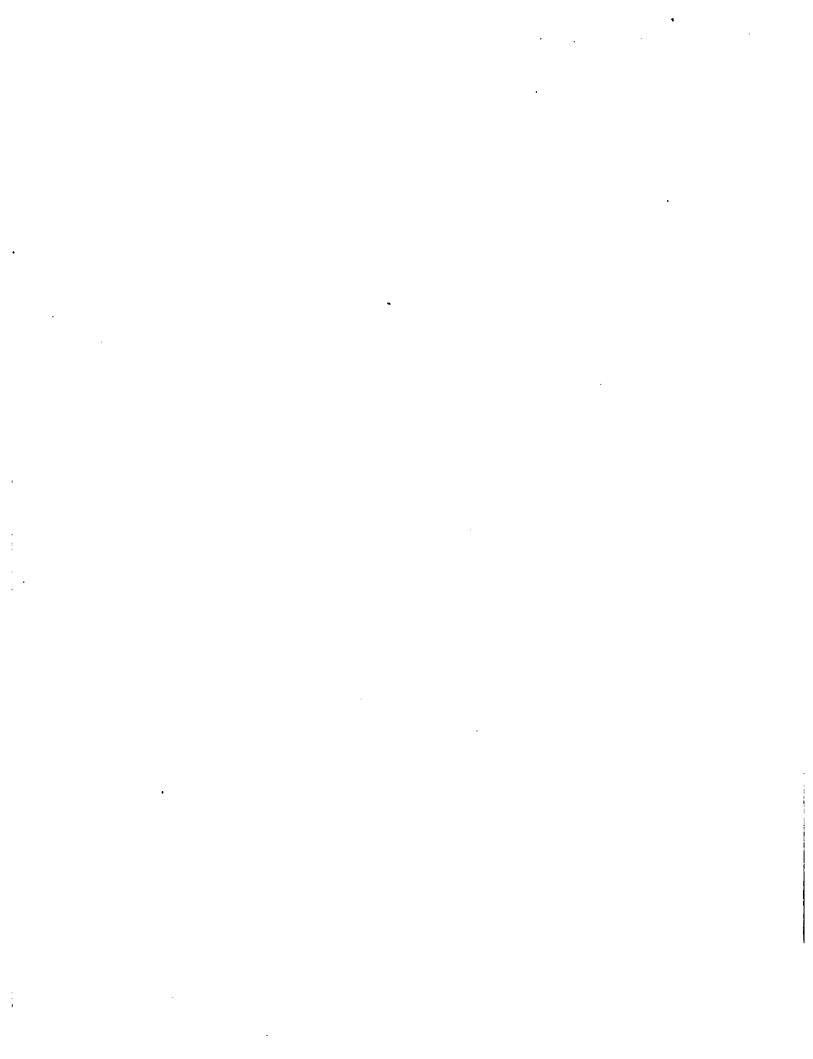
Townsend.—“It cannot mean that, since at this time Jesus did not allow himself to be known as the Messiah. And, besides, in that case, his authority would have been *the same as that of the Scribes*, not different. *They* claimed official authority.”

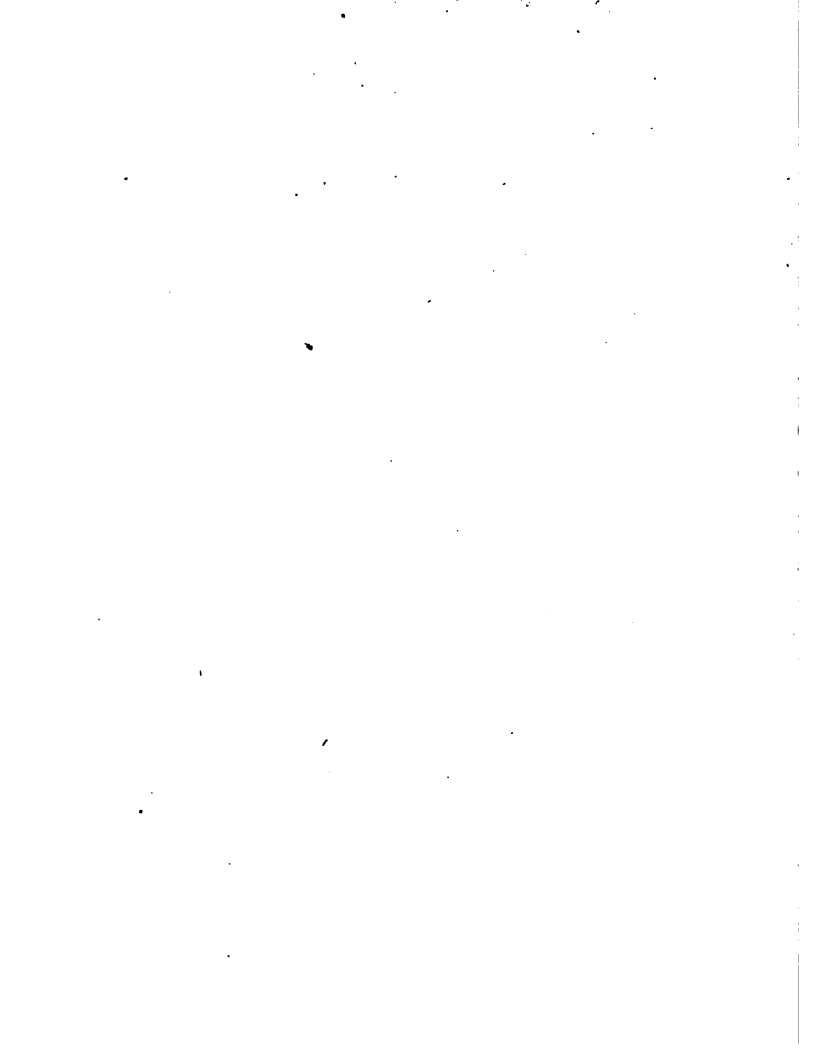
Deacon Herbert.—“Yet the authority of Jesus was not wholly in the manner. It was not in the tone of his voice, nor in any gesture or demeanor. I have known persons who had a great deal of that kind of authority, whose looks, tones, and deportment seemed to say, ‘I am Sir Oracle; when I ope my mouth, let no dog bark.’ The authority of Jesus was not official nor dogmatical. It was the authority of truth, insight, knowledge. This authority always belongs to him who knows what he is talking about.”

Alice.—“I am struck with the confidence which Jesus shows in the capacity of the human soul to understand, love, and obey the truth. The learned men did not understand him. But the common people seem to have understood him well enough, and to have heard him gladly. To the Samaritan woman he taught that God is a Spirit, and his religion spiritual. And he

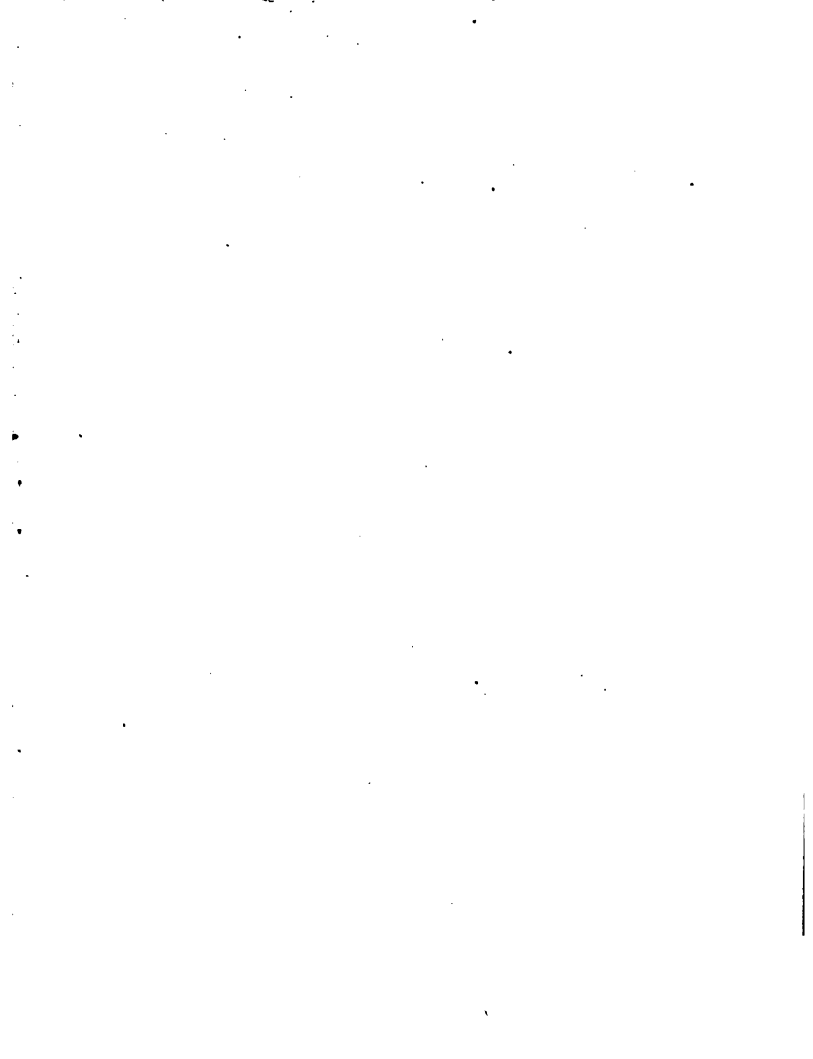
does not scruple to tell the poor, ignorant, and wicked people that they must be perfect as God in heaven. Who, before or since, ever had such confidence in human nature as he?"

Townsend.—“I also notice in his teaching the perfection of tact and art. He says everything in the most effective way. He utters the most abstract truths in the most concrete form, vast generalizations in the dress of homely particulars. The paradoxical form awakens curiosity; the happy illustration delights the understanding; the picturesque language enchants the imagination; and the opening vision of eternal laws gives the reason, the conscience, and the heart their daily bread. In answering his hearers' questions, he replies to what they think as well as to what they say, and so answers at the same time the eternal questions of the human soul. His actions illustrated his teachings; his teachings explained his conduct. Thus, though he never wrote down anything with pen and ink, his teachings were engraved on the living tables of the heart. So we may still repeat, after another eighteen centuries, that ‘never man spake like this man.’”









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